

THE DECLINE OF THE HAND-LOOM WEAVING INDUSTRY IN SCOTLAND  
DURING THE YEARS 1815-1845.

by Brenda Gaskin

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## ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout the footnotes:

Reports of Select Committee on Petitions of Hand-loom Weavers, Sessions 1834 and 1835:-

Rep.1834.

Rep.1834 M.E. (Minutes of Evidence)

Rep.1835.

Rep.1835 M.E. (Minutes of Evidence)

Reports from Assistant Hand-loom Weavers Commissioners, 1839:-

Rep.1839.

Report of the Commissioners on Hand-loom Weavers, 1841:-

Rep.1841.

Report from the Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce, and Shipping, 1833:-

Rep.C.M.S. 1833 M.E.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF THE HAND- LOOM WEAVING INDUSTRY IN SCOTLAND

The end of the Napoleonic loans in 1815 marked the beginning of the complete collapse of the hand-loom weaving industry. Wages had been falling since 1793, but during the war years it had not been clear whether the fall was due to war-time disturbances and likely to pass, or to a more deep-seated deterioration in the position of the trade. In the years after 1815 it became clear that the falling wages had not only come to stay, but were to fall yearly lower, and that the industry had entered upon a long decline.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century hand-loom weaving was one of the fore-most trades in Scotland. It had been relatively prosperous throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, and had become really very prosperous in the last two decades. The reasons for the rapid rise of the trade are so well known as to require only a mention. The increase in the supply of yarn produced by developments in spinning technique, following upon the adoption earlier in the century of the flying shuttle and other improvements in

weaving technique, enabled the hand-loom weaver to produce more than twice as much cloth as before without greater exertion. This, provided prices remained reasonably steady, more than doubled the weaver's income.<sup>1</sup> At this point, in 1779, a tremendous impetus to the trade was given by the invention of Crompton's mule which spun by power yarns of a fineness hitherto quite unattainable. The delicate cotton fabrics which could now be woven became immensely popular and the cotton industry expanded rapidly. The weavers' fortunes rose with the trade.<sup>2</sup> It changed from being a trade in which a man might earn a modest competence to one in which some at least could attain to considerable comfort.<sup>3</sup> It was not uncommon for a weaver, by dint of steady application and reasonable skill, to become a master within quite a short time.

In Scotland the expanding cotton industry settled in the west; in Glasgow, and Paisley, and in the surrounding districts, to the south and west. This area for various reasons was particularly well suited to receive it. In particular it already had a concentration of weavers accustomed to linen weaving, both plain and fine, and it had access to plentiful

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1. Rep.1834, M.E. Q.165.

2. "...there have been more persons risen to wealth and eminence of hand-loom weavers than of all other trades put together in Scotland." Ibid. Q.166.

3. "Any of the more skilled weavers could easily earn from 30s to 40s weekly." Rep.1839. p.49.



supplies of capital accumulated in the lucrative trade with North America and the West Indies.

Not all the new cotton-weavers were recruited from the ranks of the linen- and woollen-weavers, though many weavers, and in some districts whole villages, did transfer themselves to cotton weaving.<sup>1</sup> But the demand for cotton weavers, and the powerful attraction of a trade which compared so favourably in conditions and hours of work, and in prospects of advancement, with any other skilled trade, and was so much easier to enter, drew many recruits from other occupations, notably from the land.<sup>2</sup> Great numbers were drawn into the trade.

The numbers continued to increase even though wages after 1806 had begun to fall. Just as our period begins a great number of soldiers discharged after the war "exchanged the musket for the shuttle",<sup>3</sup> and entered the trade. In the

1. "The weaving manufacture is carried on to a great extent in this parish, there being at present upwards of 3,000 looms employed. Within these last ten years, however, this branch of manufacture has undergone an almost total change. Before that time they were employed in lawns, shirting, check and handkerchiefs, linen handkerchiefs for printing.. But now they are almost wholly in the muslin line, very few lawns or checks being manufactured in this place." O.S.A. O.S.A. Xll. p.112. (Barony of Glasgow). Similarly, "the woollen manufacture has been greatly lessened by the weaver being employed in weaving muslins." O.S.A. VI p.106. (Kirkmichael, Ayrshire).

2. "A country lad who could get a loom, and a friend to look over him for a few weeks, or even days, actually could, after first web-weaving of two months' labour, earn as much as a well paid mason - the highest out-door workmen I remember." Rep.1839, p.54.

3. Rep.1839, p.568.

next year, 1816, wages took a steep downward turn and a complete collapse of the hand-weaving trade, in the cotton, and part of the linen branches, set in. It declined even more rapidly than it had expanded. But it did not contract. The reasons for its continued existence, and even expansion, in a state of decline, and the causes of the decline itself, with the great consequent distress to the weavers, will form the subject of this thesis.

Throughout our period hand-loom weaving continued to be an important industry in Scotland, from the point of view of the numbers engaged in it. It was relatively more important in Scotland than in England. In England it formed the occupation of about 1/80th of the total population; in Scotland the proportion was roughly three times as great, rather more than 1/30th.<sup>1</sup>

It is not possible to state the exact numbers in the industry during the early part of our period. We come up

1. These figures are based on a comparison of the population figures of the 1841 Census with the figures for hand-loom weavers, produced by the 1839 Commission of Enquiry and shown in the Reports of the Assistant Commissioners. This date may seem to fall rather late in our period, but there is reason to believe that the numbers in the industry had not fallen much, and in some districts increased, over the previous twenty years, and as the population had been increasing steadily over the same period, the proportion given, showing the importance of the industry, will not be at any rate too high for these years.



against the fact that firm figures are simply not available. The growing interest in statistics at this time has not served us here, because as so often has been the case, the production of reliable figures has depended upon the intrusion of the state. Thus after 1833 we have a growing body of figures relating to the factory production of textiles, due to the introduction of an inspectorate. But hand-loom weaving remained largely a domestic industry, and so escaped the kind of state regulation that produces satisfactory statistics.

The most precise figures come from the Reports of the Assistant Commissioners in 1839, of which the two that concern Scotland are the Report by Jelinger C. Symons on the area South of the Forth and Clyde, and that by Dr. J.D. Harding on the Eastern parts of Scotland. The date 1839 seems late in our period on which to rely for evidence of the numbers in the trade, but Symons' 1839 figures are really based on researches made by Dr. Cleland, the Glasgow statistician, in 1820, and on information made available to him privately by Dr. Cleland about the probable changes that had occurred. Symons made his own check on the numbers in his area and arrived at a total of 52,164 looms.<sup>1</sup> In most cases he placed beside each figure which he gave for a district, the number of looms in the

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1. See Table 2 below p. 12



same district in 1828.<sup>1</sup> If these figures are added, and the districts for which no figures are given are assumed not to have changed, the total number of looms in Southern Scotland in 1828 appears to have been about 48,000. This is of course by no means a reliable figure in itself, but it can be accepted as an <sup>indication</sup> guide, which internal evidence supports, that the numbers in the weaving trade in this area had not declined between the years 1828 and 1838, and had increased considerably since 1815.<sup>2</sup>

On the East side of Scotland the figures for looms given by Dr. Harding add up to a total of 31,500, which makes a total of 83,644 looms in the trade altogether in 1838.

From information given in the two Reports a table has been drawn up to show the geographical distribution of these looms over Scotland, and the distribution of loom-strength according to the fabric woven.

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1. The 1828 figures were presumably given to him by Cleland. They were evidently not obtainable in every case. Rep.1839 pp.2-4.
  2. Baines states this to have been the case between the years 1820 and 1834. History of the Cotton Manufacture p.237. There are also the statements frequently offered by weavers such as, "The numbers of looms have increased in Paisley since 10 or 15 years ago." Rep.C.M.S.1833 M.E. Q.11991, Also Ibid.. Q.11307. Estimates of the number of cotton looms in the trade were given by witnesses in 1833 as 48,000 without including Paisley (about 5,000) Ibid. Q.11733, and in 1834 as between 45,000 and 50,000, Rep.1834, M.E. Q.820, 1937, 2109. In 1838 the number was about 51,000 Reps.1839 p.7 and 189. This shows conclusively that the numbers in the cotton branch of the trade were not declining.

TABLE 1

The Geographical Distribution of Weaving and the Distribution of Loom-Strength, according to the Fabric Woven, in 1839.

Fabrics	District where woven	Residence of Chief Manufrs.	Number of looms at work	Percent of total looms in ea. fabric group
1 Pullicates) Ginghams ) cottons Stripes & ) Checks etc)	Lanarkshire, esp. in Airdrie, Lanark & Glasgow; also at Girvan & on West coast; Perth, Dunblane, Balfroun, Ayrshire etc.	Glasgow	23,420	27.7
2 Shawls, Silks Zebras etc.	Renfrewshire, Paisley, Glasgow.	Paisley, Glasgow & Edinburgh	7,750	9.2
3 Plain Muslins	Lanarkshire, Glasgow, Irvine, Hamilton, Eaglesham, etc.	Glasgow	10,080	11.9
4 Fancy Muslins, Silk Gauzes etc.	Renfrewshire & Lanarkshire	Paisley & Glasgow	7,860	9.3
5 Thibets & Tartans	Thibets in Lanarkshire, Dalmeilington, Stratton, Sanguhar, & Hawick.	Glasgow & Hawick.	2,980	3.5
6 Carlisle Ginghams	Dumfriesshire	Carlisle	1,575	1.9
7 Woollens	South-east Scotland, Galashiels, Jedburgh, Hawick, Stirling & District.	Galashiels, Jedburgh.	3,150	3.7

TABLE 1 (contd.)

	Fabrics	District where woven	Residence of Chief Manufrs.	Number of looms at work	Percent of total looms in ea. fabric group
8	Carpets	Kilmarnock, Glasgow, Laswade, Aberdeen.	Kilmarnock, Glasgow, Laswade, Aberdeen.	1,165	1.4
9	Sail-cloths, Coarse Linens, & Haircloth.	Port-Glasgow, Leith, Musselburgh, Dundee, Arbroath, Montrose, Kirkcaldy, Aberdeen.	Port-Glasgow, Leith..	4,580	5.4
10	Harness Linens e.g. Damasks	Dunfermline		3,000	3.5
11	Osneburghs Light-sheeting etc.	East Scotland		19,000	22.5
			Total	84,560	100.0

Sources: Reports of Assistant Hand-Loom Weavers Commissioners, 1839.

1. This figure differs from the previous total 83,644 due to discrepancies in Symons' tables between total figures and individual figures.



It will be seen from Table 1. that cotton and silk weaving were centred mainly on Glasgow and Lanarkshire, Paisley and Renfrewshire. The percentage of cotton looms among the total looms cannot be exactly arrived at because Symons' tables combine all the fabrics woven in any particular district and show only the total number of looms there, without specifying how many in each branch.<sup>1</sup> But other information which he gives,<sup>2</sup> upon which Table 1 is based, along with Harding's figures which specify the cotton looms, enable us to arrive at a reasonable estimate. If we add columns 1, 3 and 6 together this makes a figure of 41% which are indisputably cotton looms. To this we may add half of columns 2, 4 and 5.<sup>3</sup> This makes a rough figure of 52%. Without laying too much stress on this percentage it would probably be perfectly correct to say that about half of the looms in the trade were cotton looms.

Linen-weaving was concentrated in the towns and villages of the East coast. Originally the linen trade had been scattered widely over the whole of Scotland, due to the

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1. Rep. 1839 pp. 2-4.

2. Ibid. p. 6 in particular. But even here there is some difficulty in extracting the cotton figures because he puts fabrics together (e.g. Thibets and Tartans column 5) which may be made of either wool or cotton, or a mixture of both.

3. It is probable that in Column 2 rather more than half, and that in column 5 rather less than half, of the looms were cotton looms.

energies of the Board of Manufactures and the British Linen Company in promoting schemes for encouraging it. But during the tremendous expansion of cotton-weaving in the last quarter of the nineteenth century linen weaving in the West was gradually supplanted by cotton and became concentrated in the East. There was some cotton-weaving in the East as well,<sup>1</sup> but with the exception of Port-Glasgow and Greenock, no linen weaving in the West. About 31% of the total looms were engaged in the linen branch.

The woollen industry had always centred on the Border region. Some cotton was also woven in this district but very little, while woollen weaving in the West was negligible. The woollen industry occupied about 7% of the looms.<sup>2</sup> Although it was the smallest and oldest branch of the trade it was nevertheless the most prosperous.

Silk weaving, mainly of plain silks and silk gauzes, and some silk shawls and 'craques', centred on Paisley and district.<sup>3</sup> Very fine silks and gauzes were used for handkerchiefs and veils and similar articles, although they were giving way in

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1. About 5,000 looms. See below p. 16, Table 3.

2. In England the percentage of woollen looms at this time was 40%.

3. Most shawls were made of silk, or spun silk, sometimes figured in cotton. The fabrics and designs were constantly changing, but the shawl trade was a very important part of the silk trade.



popularity to the fine muslins which were cheaper. At this time about 10% of the looms in the trade were engaged in the silk branch.<sup>1</sup>

This gives a final distribution of looms in the industry as follows:

Fabric	Cotton	Linen	Woollen	Silk	Total
Percentage	52	31	7	10	100

Though not as accurate as could have been wished these figures may be relied on as a reasonable guide to the distribution of the looms within the four branches of weaving in the industry.

It is possible to draw up a table for the Southern area of Scotland showing the distribution of looms in detail in this area.<sup>2</sup> (Table 2) The table also shows the numbers of the looms which were worked in factories, and the numbers engaged on harness and plain work in 1838.<sup>3</sup>

1. This figure is reached by halving column 4, and allowing slightly more than half of column 2.
2. This table is made up from Symons' figures of the towns and villages in his area. Rep. 1839, pp. 2-4. It is unfortunately not possible to make up a similar table for Dr. Harding's area but a small table showing the distribution of the looms into the three branches appears below on p. 16; and the geographical distribution of these fabrics is shown in Table 1, p. 7 & 8 above.
3. There is reason to think that a similar table for 1815 or 1820, if one could have obtained <sup>been</sup> figures of similar precision, would have shown a similar distribution of the industry over the country, but a less heavy concentration in Glasgow and the West. This is based on the assumption that many of the later recruits to the industry were Irish, who did not penetrate far inland. See below Ch. 11 p. 30-31



TABLE 2

Distribution of Hand-Looms in the South of Scotland in 1838.<sup>1</sup>

1 County	No. of Looms			
	2 Factory	3 Harness	4 Plain	5 Total
Glasgow & District <sup>2</sup>	1580	1870	7635	11,085
Ayrshire	660	3311	9055	13,026
Lanarkshire	-	843	9310	10,153
Renfrewshire	472	5466	3263	9,201
Dunbartonshire	-	14	2699	2,713
Dumfriesshire	36	-	1709	1,745
Stirlingshire	-	6	1499	1,505
Borders <sup>3</sup>	429	-	537	966
Rest of South	328	50	1392	1,770
Totals	3505	11,560	37,099	52,164

1. Source: Report of Asst. Commissioner, 1839, pp.2-4.

2. Parliamentary area, with Partick and Govan.

3. Roxburghshire, Selkirkshire, Peebleshire and Berwickshire.

The table shows the heavy concentration of the trade in the West Lowlands, particularly round Glasgow and Paisley, within the broader pattern of an industry widely distributed over the villages and towns of South Scotland. 84% of the industry in this area is concentrated in Glasgow, Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, and Renfrew. The remainder is widely scattered over the towns and villages.

Column 2 of the table shows the numbers of factory-loom in the trade. These "factories" were shops, housing hand-loom, and must not of course be confused with the power-loom factories. These hand-loom factories, containing 3,000 odd looms, were concentrated in the larger towns. For instance in Ayrshire 500 out of 660 looms in factories were situated in Kilmarnock. In Renfrewshire they were all in Paisley, Port-Glasgow, and Greenock. The rest were mainly in and around Edinburgh. The exception to this were the factory looms in the woollen industry of the Border district; these were situated in the small Border towns. The proportion of the looms in factories to the total number of looms is very small, only about 5%.<sup>1</sup> Certain cloths such as broad woollens and linens, and heavy cloths, such as sailcloths, were always woven in factories, and of course carpets, because of the breadth of loom required, but otherwise the hand-loom weaving was done

1. In Symon's district. Over the trade as a whole, about 10%  
See below p.20.



either in the home or in an adjoining loom-shop.<sup>1</sup>

Column 3 of Table 2 shows the number of looms engaged in 'harness' or 'fancy' work.<sup>2</sup> Only skilled weavers worked the harness looms. A very high concentration of these weavers was found in Renfrewshire. Almost half of the total harness looms for the whole country were found there, and over 80% of them were concentrated in Paisley. The second highest concentration was in Ayrshire. Glasgow and Lanarkshire had the remainder. Outside these areas the number of harness-looms was small. The fabrics woven on the harness looms were known as "fancy" goods, and included silks and silk gauzes, figured and sprigged muslins, striped cottons called "zebras", patterned shawls in cashmere and silk, plaids, and a variety of delicate fabrics such as lawns and cambrics, and mixtures of fine wool and silk. About 22% of the total

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1. On the organization of the industry see below pp 17-24.
  2. The word 'harness' refers to the type of loom. The loom was worked with the assistance of a 'draw-boy', a lad who manipulated the coloured yarns of the weft by a complicated arrangement of strings known as the harness. This enabled the weaver to produce the figurings and complicated patterns of the fancy fabrics. <sup>harness-weaving</sup> required, according to the complexity of the patterns, much greater skill than the plain weaving. During our period the Jacquard loom was invented, which replaced the draw-boy with a series of perforated cards which contained the pattern, and which could be manipulated by the weaver himself. The invention was adopted only slowly by the hand-weavers but eventually was incorporated into the power-loom. In 1833 there were only about 36 Jacquard looms in Scotland, all in one factory at Paisley. Rep. C.M.S. 1833, M.E. Q.11243. There were rather more than 5,000 draw-boys in Paisley at this time. Ibid. Q.11255.



looms in the trade were harness looms.<sup>1</sup> Scotland had a relatively higher share of the trade than England.

Column 4 shows the number of plain looms in Symons' district. These form 65% of the total looms in South Scotland. The fabrics woven on the plain looms were, first and foremost, muslins. In Glasgow more than half of the total plain looms were engaged on muslins.<sup>2</sup> These ranged from the very fine, such as book muslins which were woven of equal warp and weft and stiffened afterwards,<sup>3</sup> to the coarser muslins known as jaconets, and nainsooks. The rest of the cotton looms were mainly engaged on blue and white checks and stripes, gingham, pullicates, plain silks, and various mixtures which were introduced from time to time, such as "bastard thibets", and "mousselines de laine", fabrics woven with a cotton warp and a woollen weft.

Column 5 of Table 2 shows the total number of hand-looms in Symons' district, 52,164.<sup>4</sup> This includes all looms, whether in factories or at home, harness or plain.

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1. This figure is reached by adding columns 2, 4 and 10 of Table 1, above p.7 & 8.
  2. Abstract.Rep.1839, p.21.
  3. Symons mentions that Glasgow was peculiarly skilful at book muslins. "...no other country has yet successfully competed with them". Ibid. p.21.
  4. Symons' own figure is slightly different, 51,060, due to some miscalculation of his figures.
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Harding's figures, for the East side of Scotland, are not unfortunately given in sufficient detail to permit a table for the eastern district to be drawn up on the same lines as Table 2. As far as can be firmly stated it appears that the numerical distribution of the looms in this area was as shown in the following table,

Table 3.

Analysis of Loom-strength according to fabric woven in the East of Scotland 1838. <sup>1</sup>

Linen	Cotton	Woollen	Total
24,000	5,000	2,500	31,500

The great preponderance of linen looms in this area is immediately noticeable. This includes harness linens, which were mainly damasks, and coarser linens such as osnaburgh<sup>2</sup> and sheets, and then the very coarse work such as sail-cloths, canvas bagging, and haircloth. The cottons woven were mainly pullicates and gingham and similar low-priced work.<sup>3</sup> The

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1. Taken from Harding's Report 1839 pp.183-212.

2. A plain light-weight linen which takes its name from its place of origin.

3. This weaving was done mainly through agents for Glasgow manufacturers.



woollens included carpets and shawls, and varieties of tartan.

The greatest concentration of looms in this area ~~was~~ in Forfarshire. This was the centre of ~~the centre of~~ the industry.<sup>1</sup> More than half of the looms ~~were~~ found there, all engaged on linen.<sup>2</sup> Harding's figures of looms situated in the larger weaving centres amount to about 20,424. The remainder of the looms, amounting to about 10,000, were scattered over the smaller centres. Of the total weavers, about 19,000 were working on osnaburghs or similar light linens, which means that roughly two thirds of the weavers in this area were engaged on the lowest paid class of linen-weaving.

The organization of the industry took three different forms. The most common arrangement was for the weaver to own his own loom and work at home.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the weavers

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1. In 1822, the last year in which the linen stamp-law was enforced, out of a total of 36½ m. yards produced in Scotland, Forfar produced 22½ m. yards. J. Mackinnon, Social and Industrial History of Scotland, p.109.

2. Rep.1839, pp.206 and 209-211.

3. Perth was exceptional in this respect. It was common there to own a loom but to have a "loom in stance" in a shop, where there might be six, eight or ten looms belonging to other weavers. Rep. C.M.S. 1833, Qq. 11693-5.



are in this group.<sup>1</sup> They worked for manufacturers who supplied them with the 'web', that is the amount of yarn required to weave a certain piece of cloth. The weaver provided the loom, the light and fire, and starch for keeping the web "dressed".<sup>2</sup> He collected the web himself, set it up with the aid of neighbours or friends, wove it, and on completion took it back to the warehouse, where he was paid. In country districts where there was no resident manufacturer the weavers were supplied with webs by agents who worked on a commission basis.

Secondly there were also weavers who worked at home or in another weaver's shop but who did not themselves own a loom. These were known as "journeyman weavers". They were not journeymen in the traditional sense. Few had served a formal apprenticeship,<sup>3</sup> and few would go on to be master-weavers. A great many of them were married men with families, who had not managed to buy a loom for themselves and probably

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1. This is the conclusion of the Commissioners after studying the evidence of the whole country. Rep.1841, p.2. There is some reason to suppose that it was relatively less true of the cotton weaving branch than of linen, silk, or wool. See below p.20 for a statement of the comparative numbers owning and hiring looms in Glasgow.
  2. 'Dressing' the warp with a paste kept it moist and pliable and therefore able to bear the weight of the shuttle constantly passing over the warp.
  3. For a discussion of the absence of apprenticeship in the trade see below Ch. 11 p.p. 27-29.

never would.<sup>1</sup> The term 'journeyman' in the weaving trade during our period seems simply to have meant a weaver who was an outworker but who did not own his own loom. There appears to have been two classes of these journeymen. There were those who simply hired the use of the loom but in all other respects worked independently, providing their own candles, oil and starch, and attending to their own web.<sup>2</sup> There were also those who were employed by another weaver and worked on his loom and were paid by him a proportion of their earnings, roughly two thirds.

It is not possible to say exactly how many journeymen were in the trade. At the beginning of our period the number was probably fairly small as the tradition in the trade was for a man to own his own loom. As late as 1833 we have a witness from Perth saying that nearly all the weavers there had looms of their own.<sup>3</sup> But Perth was rather exceptional in this respect and it seems likely that during our period, in the cotton trade at least, the number of journeymen was growing with the declining prosperity of the trade.<sup>4</sup> The price of a

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1. "What do you pay for a second-hand loom now?" "I suppose 25s or 30s." Rep.C.M.S.1833, M.E. Q.11698. A new loom in the linen trade cost between £4 and £5 Rep.1839, p.187.

2. Though it was customary for the master to do the negotiation for the web and procure it for him. Rep.1839, p.9.

3. Rep. C.M.S. 1833, Q.11695.

4. Symons in 1838 says they were very common. Rep. p.9.

second-hand loom was between 25s and 30s. To hire a loom usually cost about 1s a week. It seems probable that a good many entrants to the cotton trade in the later years<sup>1</sup> of our period would be unable to buy their looms. We have some figures which throw some light on the position in 1838 in the cotton weaving branch in Glasgow. Symons caused a survey to be made of the looms within the Parliamentary bounds of Glasgow which shows that there were 2876 "heads of families", or adult male weavers managing their own concerns and owning their own looms, and 2045 journeymen, all of them managing their own concerns and hiring their looms.<sup>2</sup> Out of the total 9,000 odd<sup>3</sup> hand-looms being worked in Glasgow in 1839 therefore, rather under a quarter were worked by journeymen. It is reasonable to suppose that the proportion in Glasgow was high, because of the preponderance there of cotton looms engaged on low paid work, and it is possible that the proportion of journeymen weaving throughout the countryside may have been slightly lower.

Thirdly, a small percentage of the weavers, roughly 10%, wove in factories. These were "shops" where the looms were actually worked by hand. Here the loom and the web were provided by the manufacturer. The weaver had his web "beamed"

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1. See below, Ch. III, for table of falling wages p. 77.

2. Rep. 1839, p. 4.

3. Ibid. p. 2.



and "dressed" for him by machinery.<sup>1</sup> Certain charges were made, usually a weekly deduction for light,<sup>2</sup> and usually a charge for winding the weft on to the bobbins.<sup>3</sup> But apart from these small charges the factory weaver's weekly wage was net.

As a rule the nature of the fabric to be woven determined which type of organization was adopted. Linen-weaving used all three methods. Heavy work, such as canvas bagging and sail-cloth, was done entirely in factories.<sup>4</sup> The light plain linens were woven at home, usually in separate loomshops attached to the weavers' houses, with about four looms in each shop.

At least half of these weavers owned their own looms and hired

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1. The invention of the dressing-machine is discussed in Ch. 11 p.55. "Beaming" means setting up the loom ready to begin weaving a new web. The warps, which are the longitudinal threads, are passed through comb-like instruments called the heddles and the reed. The reed keeps the threads steady and the heddles separate the threads to enable groups of them to be raised and lowered separately. The warps are tied to the beam of the loom. The weft threads, wound on pirns and encased in the shuttle, are then sent backwards and forwards across the loom as the warps are raised and lowered. Beaming the webs often occupied most of a day. The weavers helped each other and the task usually occupied most of Monday. By getting his web ready beamed and dressed for him the weaver in the factory was able to earn considerably more than he would have done on the same fabric at home even though his rate of payment was lower.

2. E.g. 3d a week at the factories in Hawick and Jedburgh. Rep. 1839 p.40.

3. 1d a week at Hawick, 1d in the shilling at Jedburgh. Ibid. p.40. The weaver at home usually had his winding done by his wife. (The bobbins are usually referred to as the "pirns". The word "pirn" for bobbin or reel is still in use in Scotland).

4. Ibid. p.187.

out the others or had them in use by their wives and children.<sup>1</sup>  
 In the harness branch, which was mostly damasks, about half of the weavers were journeymen, paying for the use of their loom with a quarter of their earnings.<sup>2</sup>

In the woollen branch the majority of the weavers wove in factories. All the heavy and broad cloths, plaidings, shawls and carpets were woven in factories.<sup>3</sup> Light woollens such as tartans and shawls were woven at home by weavers owning their own looms, or in a loom-shop where they owned their own loom but rented a "stance".<sup>4</sup>

In the cotton branch very little weaving was done in factories. In the area of Scotland South of the Forth and Clyde where roughly 40,000 cotton looms were worked, less than 2,000 were in factories.<sup>5</sup> The advantage of factory production in very low-priced goods was small although where it did exist, the weavers, owing to the economies mentioned earlier,<sup>6</sup> were able to earn higher wages.<sup>7</sup> But generally speaking, with the exception of a few establishments in Glasgow and elsewhere, cotton weaving was done outside factories. In this branch, in addition to the high proportion of journeymen weavers

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1. Ibid. p.188.

2. Ibid. p. 186 and 202.

3. Ibid. p.55.

4. Ibid. p. 185.

5. Ibid. pp.2, 3, 4. (It must be borne in mind that these are hand-loom and not power factories).

6. See Footnote 1 p. 21.

7. See below Ch. 111, pp. 96-97.



mentioned earlier, there was also a great number of young persons weaving. This group, which did not exist in the woollen trade, and was not very numerous in the linen trade, was a very important section of the cotton branch. It is usually referred to as "women and children" but a general impression, which unfortunately cannot be substantiated by exact figures, throws doubt on the numbers of women weaving. Weaver's wives generally speaking were fully employed with winding the pirns and looking after their families. As a rule <sup>single</sup> women were more profitably employed in the spinning mills or steam factories than at the looms. It is possible that they only worked in numbers at the loom in country districts, where they had fewer opportunities of employment. However, the distribution of looms between the women and the children makes no difference to the total figure, which was substantial, and which undoubtedly affected the scale of wages in this branch, lowering the wages of cotton-weavers in general.

It is possible to form a good idea of their numbers from Symons' invaluable census of Glasgow in June 1838.<sup>1</sup> The number of heads of families was stated at 2,876; the number of journeymen at 2,045, making a total of 4,921. If we assume that there was one male adult to each 'family', and add the number of journeymen, we should arrive at a rough figure of

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Rep. 1839, p.21.



the total of adult male weavers in Glasgow. This figure is practically 5,000. If we compare this with the number of looms, 9,350, the difference, 4,429, gives us a rough estimate of the number of women and children in the trade there. Thus in Glasgow rather less than half the looms were worked by women and children. This figure may be slightly on the high side as it makes no allowance for unoccupied looms.<sup>1</sup> But the proportion, of rather less than half the looms being worked by women and children, probably holds good for the cotton trade in general, especially as 90% of the trade was situated in Glasgow and Paisley.

Therefore rather less than half of the cotton looms were invariably engaged on the lowest paid work. When there is added to this the fact that some at least of the adult weavers were sometimes on the worst paid work, because they could get no other, and that many of the weavers classed as 'heads of families' were old, or unskilled at their job, it seems clear that certainly more than half of the cotton weavers were at times engaged on the worst paid work.<sup>2</sup> On Symons' figures 30,075 out of a total of 52,164 looms were employed <sup>his</sup> on the

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1. At this date (1838) there were only 100 unoccupied.

2. It is not possible to speak so decisively of the linen trade, because of the less exact nature of Dr. Harding's Report. We know that of the 24,000 linen looms, 19,000 were on the lower-paid fabrics.

district on the worst paid work.<sup>1</sup> If we add to this a conservative estimate taken from Dr. Harding's figures, of about 25,000 looms in his district engaged on light-linens and cottons, we reach a figure of about 55,000. This means that about 55,000 weavers, out of roughly 83,000, were engaged on the worst-paid work.<sup>2</sup> This statement, taken in the light of what the wages were for this kind of work from 1816 onwards,<sup>3</sup> will give an indication of the fearful depression that existed in the trade.

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1. Rep.1839. pp.6 and 7.

2. This amounts to about 66% of the trade.

3. See below Ch. lll.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CAUSES OF THE DEPRESSION IN THE INDUSTRY

The severe depression of the Hand-loom Weaving industry in the first half of the nineteenth century is well-known. The explanation has usually been sought in the introduction of machinery. But a close investigation of the subject shows that the problem is far more complex than this. It seems clear that the competition of the power-loom was by no means the decisive factor in the decline of hand-loom weaving as a major industry. The industry had begun to decline before the competition of the power-loom was felt to any degree.<sup>1</sup>

The earlier, and in all probability the main, factor in producing the severity of the decline was the gross overstocking of the trade. The supply of labour was greatly in excess of the numbers which could be employed in the trade, at a reasonable wage. This state of affairs continued throughout our period, 1815-45, and even increased, while at the same time the demand for that labour was diminishing.

There were four main factors which contributed to the over-supply of labour to the industry. The first factor was

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1. See below pp. 54-63.



undoubtedly the great ease with which the trade was learned, combined with the fact that there were no barriers of any sort to incomers to the trade. Even in the skilled branches there was no proper system of indenture and apprenticeship. Secondly, this period saw a very great influx of Irish and Highlanders into the South and West of Scotland. These unskilled immigrants flocked into the lower branches of the Hand-loom weaving industry. Thirdly, the accessibility of the trade, - due to the ease with which weaving was learned and the absence of any barrier to entry, - was not typical of other trades. Most trades had combinations of sufficient strength and importance to prevent unapprenticed workers from entering. Thus the weaver, bedevilled by the situation in his own trade, could not himself escape to another, and had great difficulty in putting his son to another trade, though anyone might put his child to weaving. Finally, the employment of women and children in the weaving industry, practically all employed in the lowest class of work, meant the lowering of wages for adults in general.

The first question, that of apprenticeship, is a frequently recurring topic in the evidence of witnesses before

the Select Committees. Many weavers felt it to be at the root of the trouble.

Weaving plain stuffs was very easily learned. It took about 18 months to 2 years to teach an average child mastery of the craft, but only about 2 months to teach him enough to do coarse weaving at 3s or 4s a week. Looms with apparatus complete could be rented for 1/- a week. There was no proper system of apprenticeship, and as far as can be gathered there never had been, during the expansion of the trade in the second half of the eighteenth century, any explicit rules governing the recruiting of apprentices, though the desirability of this was constantly before the weavers. In these years it had been quite usual, though not compulsory, for a skilled weaver to take on an apprentice and teach him the trade for an agreed fee. But as the trade became less prosperous the custom died out. The apprentice would rarely stay his full time because as neither party had the means to draw up a legal indenture and the arrangement was purely verbal, he could leave when he chose. In 1812 the weavers were petitioning Parliament for a ruling on the point. They proposed a 7 years apprenticeship for weaving in order to check "the superfluity of hands that were daily rushing into the trade."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Report on Petition of Journeymen Weavers 1811, p.7.

But also they wished to see the same system extended to every trade. Then the parents or the children "would go to the trade which they thought proper,"<sup>1</sup> and weaving would be relieved of its role as the Cinderella of the trades. But they were unsuccessful in their petition and the matter was allowed to slide. Local groups and societies attempted to make their own rules, but it was impossible to enforce them.<sup>2</sup>

During our period it became very uncommon to take on a properly indentured apprentice and teach him his craft.<sup>3</sup> Some sort of apprenticeship must have existed in the skilled branches of the trade in order to teach the craft, but only in the form of a series of private agreements between parties, and not capable of raising the prestige or restricting the entry to the trade.<sup>4</sup> In the plain-weaving, where the tradition of apprenticeship had in any case been very slight, it lapsed completely.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid. p.16.

2. The articles of the General Association of Weavers in Scotland, instituted in 1824, gives specific ruling on the number of years apprentices are to serve, their treatment, and their wages. These rules are quoted in the Report from S.C. on Combination Laws 1825. Appendix 16. p.53. But it is to be feared that they carried no weight.

3. Rep. C.M.S. 1833, Q.11714.

4. "The present stamp duty may be said not to be paid at all by weavers, as few, scarcely any, of their apprentices are under an indenture; everyone of these however, would be under one, were the duty reduced to a moderate sum."

Rep. 1834, M.E.Q. 3307. See also Rep. C.M.S. 1833. Q. 11714.

5. Ibid. Q.6065.



The lack of the apprenticeship system had the most serious consequences for the trade. The weavers themselves were the first to recognise this but found themselves unable to do anything about it.<sup>1</sup> They felt they had a legitimate grievance in the cost of the stamp-duty required to draw up a legal indenture. One of the weaver witnesses of 1834 gives the weavers' views very clearly. "The Paisley Weavers' Committee are anxious for the abolition of the duty on apprentices' indentures. They think that the duty should at least be lowered, and that a small duty would raise a larger revenue than the present high one, especially in the case of weavers' indentures. At present, an indenture costs nearly 30s; the stamp being about 20s and the change for extending from 9s to 10s. This amounts almost to a prohibition of apprentices to the Hand-loom Weavers. The masters, however, evade the law, by taking apprentices without indentures; and just now, out of 800 apprentices in Paisley, only 4 are bound by indentures. But as a weaver generally receives the half of his apprentices' earnings, and as any master who may do so is liable for the penalty, which in such a case may be imposed for the protection of the stamp-duty, and

which amounts to 10 1. consequently 99 out of every 100

1. The desire to restrict the numbers coming in to the Trade lay behind the great strike of 1812. See below Ch. VI. pp. 181-2.

masters in Paisley are liable for that penalty. And although I never knew of a case where the penalty was exacted, still the masters are in the disagreeable condition of being liable for it. Were indentures containing the usual regulations prepared by the Stamp-Office, and directly issued to the weavers, at a sum of from 4s to 5s., the arrangement would be very desirable and thus obviate law expenses. Besides this, a small duty, by more readily disposing the weavers to bind their apprentices, would, I am convinced, be ten times more productive to the revenue than the existing duty. But independently of these considerations, encouraging masters to bind their apprentices would be for the interest of the trade itself; and, what is of more consequence, would be very beneficial from a moral point of view.<sup>"1</sup>

It was in fact very generally felt among the weavers that the lack of an apprenticeship system with a properly collected entry fee was one of the greatest causes of their present misfortunes. While such a state of affairs lasted they felt there could be little real hope of an improvement in their condition.

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1. Analysis of the Evidence taken before the Select Committee on H.L. Weavers Petitions 1834-1835. p. 85

The seriousness of such a position, where entry into the trade was entirely unrestricted, was greatly increased by the fact that during this period a tremendous influx took place of immigrants from Ireland and refugees from the Highland Clearances who were yearly making their way in great numbers into South-West Scotland. This was earlier referred to as the second factor in contributing to the over-stocking of the labour market. It comes second only in the sense that it is dependent on the first - that is the ease of entry into the Weavers' trade. In every other sense it is by far the most important single cause of the declining state in which the Hand-loom Weaving Industry found itself in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

This is a bold statement and one that demands argument and proof. In the first place the actual volume of the influx of immigrants during our period may be briefly indicated. In 1821 out of a population of 147,000 in Glasgow there were 25,000 Irish.<sup>1</sup> In 1831 out of a population of 202,426 there were 35,554 Irish.<sup>2</sup> In 1841 out of a total population in Scotland of 2,620,184 there were 126,321 Irish of which 97,514 were situated in the weaving counties of Lanark (55,915),

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Renfrew, Dumbarton, Stirling, and Ayr.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that  
 1. J.E. Handley. The Irish in Scotland. 1798-1845, p.100.  
 2. Ibid. loc.sit.  
 3. Ibid. pp.83-84.



long before the dramatic events of 1845-6 the Irish immigration had reached immense proportions.

The movement was accelerated by the cheap steamship fares which made the west coast of Scotland accessible to even the most impoverished.<sup>1</sup> The weavers watched with dismay the disappearance of the frontiers, and indeed there is no doubt, from evidence of both weavers and outsiders, that a great part of this vast immigration found its way sooner or later into the Hand-loom Weaving industry.<sup>2</sup> In the first place a good many of the Irish had been weavers at home and with the decline of their own trade in linens and woollens had come over to try their luck in the rising cotton trade of the West of Scotland. In the second place it was a trade very likely to attract the unskilled man, being easy to learn, not unduly heavy, and requiring no capital, no apprenticeship, and no entry fee.

That the number of Irish did not actually cause unemployment in the industry is due solely to the fact that

1. "The Irish come over, I believe at from 4d to 6d a head." Rep. of S.C. on Emigration 1826. M.E. Q.2200.  
"The cheapness and facility of travelling now making Ireland and Scotland like neighbouring countries, it has frequently happened that the Irish can come from Belfast for 1s; the fare was once reduced to 6d; but now it can be got I believe for 5s." Rep. 1834. M.E. Q.3627.
2. "Have many of those (Irish) Hand-loom weavers come over to Scotland?" "To a very great extent. I think that is one cause of the depression of wages, the very great facility with which people come from Ireland to this country for the purpose of weaving." Ibid. Q.1358.

wages were dragged down so low in the plain branches that it did not pay manufacturers to install machinery when they could call on labour so cheaply. In other words, given no influx of labour from outside, the competition of power-loom in the plain branches would have driven wages down, but the influx of labour was in fact so great as to keep wages below the point at which machinery could effectively compete with hand-labour.

In thus postponing in Scotland the advent of the Power-loom in the lower branches of the industry the Irish did the industry a great disservice. It was not the competition of labour with machinery, but the competition of labour with labour, which dragged out the decline of the Hand-loom Weaving Industry. I feel this to be the crux of the matter. J.E. Handley puts forward the view that the influx of the Irish labourers merely "gave the quietus sooner than might have happened to a wretched business."<sup>1</sup> To my mind this is the exact opposite of what really happened. The incoming Irish labour in fact prevented, or retarded, the mechanisation of the industry in those fields in which the power-loom could best have taken over.

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If the industry was to become wholly mechanised what

1. J.E. Handley. Op.cit.p.133.

was needed was such a technological advance in power-weaving as would make it physically impossible for a man to subsist in competition with the machine. The fact that Hand-loom Weavers were able to continue in their trade for such a long period means that the rate of technological advance was not great enough to achieve the expulsion of hand-labour. It might be argued that in the absence of an Irish influx the wages of Scottish weavers in competition with machinery would have fallen and hence would have had the same retarding effect on mechanisation. But it is possible to doubt this. It is certain that, even without the influx of the Irish, Scottish wages would have been driven down, but this would have occurred in a process of continuing competition between hand-weaving and power-weaving, a process in which there would have been a continuing incentive to improve power-weaving. As it was the Irish influx drove the wages of hand-loom weaving down so low that any competitive tension between hand and power-weaving was eliminated, with the consequence of retarding the technical development of the power-loom.<sup>1</sup>

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1. "You think those who manufacture by hand do it quite as cheaply with human labour as the man who is engaged in Power-Looms?" "Yes."

"Then that at once closes the opinion, that the power-looms can be extended to a considerable extent as long as human labour remains as it now does?" "Yes."

M.E. Rep. C.M.S. 1833. Q.1972-1973.



Thus instead of giving the final push to a dying industry the entrance of the Irish dragged out the death, by supplying a constant stream of labour to fields open to mechanisation. It is true that a distressing state of affairs would have been bound to occur in the hand-loom weaving industry when the power-loom ousted the unskilled hand-labourer, but it is impossible that it could have been on such a scale, and it was unlikely that it would have lasted so long, had there been no Irish to affect the issue.

A third factor in the over-stocking of the labour market in the weaving industry is to be found in the existence of combinations in other trades, and the lack of combination in the weaving trade. The difficulty of combination on any scale had proved insuperable to the weavers.<sup>1</sup> In the first place they were so scattered throughout loom-shops and cottages that it was difficult to meet or to keep in touch. And they worked for so many different masters, on so many different materials to so many different specifications, that to obtain concerted action over the whole field of the trade presented tremendous problems. Other trades had been able to

1. Chapter VI pp. 174-194.

take advantage of the repeal of the Combination Laws of 1824/5, but not the weavers. "For other trades, by means of their combinations, being concentrated, can defend themselves very well against their masters who have nevertheless a propensity towards reduction; we being scattered over the whole face of the country, cannot communicate with each other, and we are easily routed by our masters."<sup>1</sup>

The weavers' attempts to form combinations will be discussed later in Chapter IV, but here it is sufficient to say that whereas the weavers formed no union of any strength, other trades did, and were sufficiently strong to keep their wages up, and to keep the weavers out.<sup>2</sup> All the witnesses before the Committee of 1834 who were questioned on this were firm on this point. "Have many of the Hand-loom Weavers gone into factories? No; the whole of the trades have combined, and it is impossible for a weaver to break in upon them."<sup>3</sup> And again, "Every trade finds it has a redundancy, and a combination is formed to shut out anyone who is not connected with their own families, and it requires great interest to get in."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Rep. 1834, M.E. Q.991.

2. "I do not know scarcely a trade in Glasgow that has not combined for the support of their wages." Ibid. Q.1092. This is confirmed by evidence in the Reports on Combinations 1825- & 1838, and the Report by the Assistant Commissioners on Hand-loom Weaving in 1839.

3. Rep. C.M.S. 1833 M.E. Q.11716. Rep. 1839, p.55.

4. Rep. 1834 M.E. Q.1042.

Then in the second place the numbers engaged in weaving the cheap cloths made them so very cheap indeed that it seemed to the critics quite impossible that even combination could have squeezed a higher wage out of the trade. But in other sections of the trade where unions had been established the wages were very much higher.<sup>1</sup> A witness who had this subject very much at heart voiced the general feelings of the weavers when he said, "Our opponents generally say that a yard of muslin is so very cheap that it is impossible that you can live comfortably in producing it, but we have learnt that there are a number of other branches employed in the producing of a yard of cloth, from the raw material till it comes into consumption, and that, through the effects of combination, those employed in producing that yard of cloth have the means of protecting themselves, and that, through those means, they are enabled to be comfortable while we are miserable."<sup>2</sup>

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1. "Now I apprehend that combinations have had a wonderful tendency to keep up the price of wages in other branches. Now it is certainly true that every man, except the weaver, that is employed in making any piece can earn his 20s a week. I believe the average earnings of every adult-labourer in making any piece, the moulder, the mechanic, the spinner, the dyer, the calico-printer, and I may say that every species of labour that is bestowed upon any piece receives an equivalent for their labour at the rate of 20/- a week upon it, except the weaver." Ibid. Q.5737.
  2. Rep. C.M.S. 1833, M.E. Q.11734.



It is hard to see how a successful combination could have been achieved among the weavers but undoubtedly its absence put the weaving trade at a great disadvantage to other trades, not only because of the lack of bargaining power but also, and perhaps more injurious, by making it all too frequently the repository of labour which they excluded.

Fourthly, some contribution to the swollen ranks of the weaving trade was undoubtedly made by the employment in the trade of women and children. This in part follows from the previous discussion. It was obvious that women and children, especially of weavers' families, would take to the trade. If they could get in nowhere else, they could get in there.<sup>1</sup> But many children were put to weaving whose parents were following quite different trades.<sup>2</sup> The reason usually given

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1. "Do you think that the other trades which have been united for the purpose of preventing depression of wages, or if possible the over-increase of hands coming to their trades, would be willing to have the children of weavers sent by the government, and at the expense of the government to acquire a knowledge of these trades?" "No, ..." "It would not be a desirable interference?" "It would be most awful; it would create a rupture in Society; they would be up in arms at once." Rep. 1834, M.E. Qq. 5274 and 5276.

2. Ibid. Q.2584.

was that in the country districts and small towns there was nothing else to put them to.<sup>1</sup> A truer reason would probably be that there was nothing else to put them to so young. Probably at no other trade could they make a comparable wage so young. It seems likely therefore that some of the younger children who were weaving were not destined to stay permanently in the trade but were merely put to it for a year or two, to earn a few shillings a week, ~~and~~ until they were old enough, and strong enough, to follow their fathers' trade. It would be interesting to know what was the proportion of young children to older children weaving. It seems that the age of entry had been getting earlier.<sup>2</sup> Children of <sup>seven</sup> 7 and <sup>eight years</sup> 8 <sub>2</sub> could be found sitting daily at their looms. The effect of the Factory Act of 1833, in prohibiting the labour in textile factories of children under nine years of age, would probably be to strengthen this tendency of employing young children in weaving and in the other domestic industries.

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1. "Do you know that in the country districts the agricultural labourers and others send their children to weave? And in those districts the children of the hand-loom weavers are almost invariably brought up to the loom?" "Yes, because they have nothing else to put them to." Ibid. *Qs.* 1084 and 1085
  2. One of the manufacturers of the period seems to confirm this. "Are not the young children brought to work upon the loom at an earlier age than they were formerly?" "I should think they are." Ibid. q.1512.

In Glasgow, where the opportunity existed, the weaver often sent his children, especially daughters, to the power-loom factories.<sup>1</sup> But in the country districts there was no such outlet. The presence of children, and of women, working on so many looms, amounting to about half the total,<sup>2</sup> inevitably affected the industry adversely. It is noteworthy that in the heavy linen and woollen branches, where women and children were not employed, wages were markedly higher. The women and children were invariably engaged in the plain cottons, and supplied labour to the already overstocked pool of unskilled labour in that field.

The women who actually wove at the loom seem to have been the wives of the Irish, rather than the Scottish weavers, and do not seem to have been great in number, but most of the wives helped in the trade by winding pirns, thereby earning for themselves an average of 1/6 a week, and keeping the hand-loom constantly supplied with bobbins. There does not seem to have been any complaint that the women competed with men for work, but of course every contribution of labour to

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1. "In Glasgow where there are power-loom, the girls have a far better chance of being employed, but the boys remain the same." Many of the children of the hand-loom weavers are sent to the power-loom weaving; many of their daughters; and it is the support that they bring into a family that enables a weaver in the neighbourhood of Glasgow to live." Ibid. Q.q.2324 and 1083.

2. See above Ch. 1. p.24



the already overstocked market lowered the rate of remuneration for all. In this connection it ought to be added that the weavers took grave exception to the use of weaving in prisons as a suitable trade to which to set prisoners. In the depressed state of their industry they felt it hard that they should have to face the competition of the low prices of prison work. It is not likely that this competition made much real difference to their state but they felt it was an injury which could more easily be removed than most of their troubles, and that it was particularly unjust in view of the fact that there were in any case far too many hands in the trade already.

At the same time as the supply of hands was becoming excessive the demand for their labour was diminishing. This arose from a variety of reasons. The weavers themselves were inclined to place high amongst these the effect of the Corn Laws of 1815, and ardently wished for their repeal.<sup>1</sup> The

1. "The operation of the laws affecting the importation of corn was stated by the witnesses of all classes, with scarcely an exception, to be most injurious to the handloom weavers, as well as to their immediate employers. To this cause the gradual deterioration of their condition was generally, and in many cases exclusively, attributed. It would be impossible to describe too strongly the unanimity and strength of the feeling on this point which pervades the district." Rep. 1839 p.192.

abolition of the Corn Laws in the 30's might have widened the market for textiles to the extent that the income lost by the landlords would be more evenly diffused either at home or abroad. At home there would have been a redistribution of income and also an increase in the total of income. This was what the weavers hoped for, but whether it would have been to the advantage of the textile industry in consuming more of its goods would have depended on the relative consumption of the landholding classes as against the manufacturing population. It was thought that abolition would almost certainly increase foreign demand for manufactures because the effect of increased import of corn would be to increase the incomes of foreign producers. Of course British textile producers would have to compete with domestic producers for the higher demand. It cannot be assumed that Abolition, had it come say in 1836, instead of 1846, would automatically have aided the weavers but on balance it seems likely that it would have added to the demand for their labour and to that extent would have lessened their hardship. It is possible to assess the situation only in the most general terms.

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A consequence of the Corn Laws which was frequently complained of, by the entire manufacturing population as well

as by the weavers, was that by compelling foreigners to manufacture for themselves, at lower prices, what they could not afford to purchase from Britain, they not only drove Britain out of the custom of these countries, but also out of third markets. The dangers and rigours of foreign competition were thereby said to be greatly increased.

What exactly the dangers of foreign competition in weaving were is obviously of great importance to any study of the trade. But there is very little information on the purely Scottish side of this question and for the most part it can only be looked at from the angle of the weaving trade of the United Kingdom as a whole. It is possible indeed that the general influences outweighed in importance those that were peculiar to Scotland, but to be sure of this one would need to know the degree of dependance of the Scottish weaving trade on overseas markets, and whether it diverged significantly from the average for the country. This is not known.

During the period 1815-1845 there was a great increase in the quantity of textiles exported. Very largely this was an expansion of cotton exports. Exports of woollen goods (with one or two exceptions, including wool and cotton mixtures) did not participate in this expansion, but there was a substantial rise in the export of linen cloth after



1830. The movements of exports over the period are shown in Tables I, II, and III, shown below

Table 1  
Exports of Cotton Manufactures from the U.K., 1815-1844.

Yearly Average for	Cotton Yarns m. lbs.	Piece Goods m. yards.	Piece Goods £.m.
1815-19	14.1	227.4	14.3
1820-24	26.4	293.4	13.5
1825-29	46.3	347.0	12.4
1830-34	70.2	475.8	12.9
1835-39	99.0	629.6	15.4
1840-44	131.6	848.2	15.4

Table 2  
Exports of Linen Cloth and Yarn from the U.K.<sup>1</sup> 1815-1844.

Yearly Average for	Cloth		Yarn m. lbs.
	Quantity m. yards	Value £.m.	
1820-24	50.3	---	---
1825-29	53.0	---	---
1830-34	62.6	2.4 <sup>2</sup>	1.5 <sup>3</sup>
1835-39	76.2	2.8	9.4
1840-44	84.9	2.8	24.4

1. Includes exports of Irish linen. Also, includes sailcloth.
2. Declared value of exports in 1834 only. Quantity exported in that year was 67.8 m. yards.
3. Exports in 1834 only.

Table 13

Exports of Woollen Goods from the U.K., 1815-1844.

1	2	3	4	5
Yearly Average for	Total value of exports. <sup>1</sup> £.m.	Cloths  000 pieces	Stuffs Woollen or Worsted  000 pieces	Carpets  000 yds.
1815-19	7.7	474	704	804
1820-24	6.0	370	1064	761
1825-29	5.2	357	1028	1000
1830-34	5.4	468	1506	663
1835-39	6.2	542	1429	867
1840-44	6.3	230	2128	761

1. The values in column 2 are total values of all manufactured woollen goods, excluded yarn, exported. It covers a wider range of goods than these shown in the remaining three columns.

One striking fact, observable both in cotton and linen exports, is the stability of the value of exports in the face of tremendous expansion in the quantity exported. This was a period of a downward trend in prices, but by far the most important factor at work was declining cost of production.

Thus in spite of the much greater increase in the quantity of cotton exports compared with linens and woollens, the relative



importance of the various textiles in total exports remained practically unaltered during these years. In the period 1820-24 cotton goods (including yarn) amounted to 46% of the total value of British exports, and other textiles accounted for 23%. In the period 1840-44 the corresponding percentages were 46% and 22% and there was almost no variation in the intervening years.

In all classes of textiles there was a very great increase in the export of yarns. The rate of growth in the export of cotton yarn was very much greater than in piece goods. This was a reflection of the earlier progress of mechanisation in the spinning process, and of Britain's lead in this development.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of exports to the textile trades was very great; although the proportion of output exported at this period was not as high as it was to become later in the century. It has been estimated that during these years about half of the cotton manufacture (i.e. including yarn) was exported.<sup>2</sup> Scotland probably participated fully in this trade. We have a statement that of the 105 million yards of cotton cloth produced in Glasgow in 1818 nearly one half

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1. The effect of yarn exports on the weavers' position is discussed below pp 52-3.

2. Ellison, The Cotton Trade of Great Britain, p.60.



was exported.<sup>1</sup> Most of this cloth was woven on hand-loom. In that year the number of power-loom in the city was only 2380, against about 19,000 hand-loom.<sup>2</sup>

There are no figures to show what proportion of the total production of linen cloth was exported. It is known that between 1820 and 1825 about one quarter of the linen goods shipped from Ireland went to overseas destinations.<sup>3</sup>

(The remainder was retained in Britain). In 1833, according to Porter,<sup>4</sup> the amount of linen, sailcloth and bagging shipped from Dundee was 60 million yards, probably equal to the entire shipments from Ireland. But only a fraction of this would represent consignment to overseas markets. A witness before the Select Committee of 1834 thought that most of the cloth woven in the Eastern Countries was for the home market, although of the output of Dundee itself more than half went abroad.<sup>5</sup> The market for heavy canvases and coarse linen fabrics was principally at home,<sup>6</sup> but some bagging went

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1. Cleland, "The Rise and Progress of Glasgow. pp.237-239.

2. This figure is the (rounded) total of hand-loom in Glasgow and its suburbs in August 1819. Not all these looms were occupied at that time. However it is not clear whether the total of 105 million yards included production for Glasgow carried out in other towns. If this were the case the total number of hand looms involved in this output would have to be increased considerably.

3. Porter, Progress of the Nation (1847 Edn.) p.228.

4. Ibid. p.230.

5. Rep. 1834. M.E. Qq.3459-3460.

6. Rep. 1839. p.187.

abroad.<sup>1</sup> Probably the export market was of greater importance in quality trade; for instance, a very high proportion of the damasks woven in and around Dunfermline went to foreign markets. According to the Assistant Commissioner (Harding) in 1839, nearly one half of Dunfermline's output went to the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Information is most scanty in the case of wool.

McCullough put the total value of woollen manufacture at £26 millions.<sup>3</sup> Exports at that time were in the region of £10 millions. It is probable that the proportion of exports would be higher then than earlier in the century and this would indicate that during our period the export market was of less importance to weavers of woollen cloths than to cotton weavers.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the silk-weaving trade, in which Scotland had a share, had overseas markets, but exports of silk goods were not large. In the eighteen-twenties they amounted to well under half a million pounds, although they rose in the thirties.

On the question of the competition that faced these British woven goods in foreign markets it is probably true

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1. Rep. 1834 M.E. Q.3457.

2. Rep. 1839 p.185.

3. McCullough, Commercial Dictionary, p.1428.

4. This is borne out by Symons Rep. 1839 p.56.

to say that, treating Britain as a unit, the most important competition came from the domestic weaving trades of importing countries. That is to say that with certain exceptions, there were no other great exporting nations in the field. This was certainly the case in cotton: here, as one witness pointed out to the 1834 Committee, it was "Glasgow versus Bolton in the markets of the world."<sup>1</sup> Cotton-weaving abroad was increasing, of course assisted in part by yarns spun in Britain, but the expansion was not as rapid as in Britain and at this period such production was aimed primarily at home markets.

In woollen goods, the export trade was of much longer standing and had not been subject to such rapid recent growth as cotton. Here again Britain was predominant as an exporter and again the main competition was with the domestic industries of the other countries. It seems to have been principally in linen and silk that the corresponding British trades met most competition from other exporting countries. Germany, and to some extent Russia, were exporters of linen cloth.<sup>2</sup> In silk goods the dominating position was held by France.

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1. Rep.1834. M.E. Q. 707.

2. See Rep.1834 M.E. Q.3457. Certain kinds of linen goods - "Russias" and Osnaburgs - were produced in, and exported from, the places from which they took their name. The Scottish and Irish equivalents were classed as "imitations" and did not command as high a price.



In the following Table, the importation of textiles into New York, from Britain, Germany and France, for the period 1829-31 is given. America was an important market for textiles, and the relative importation from these three European countries probably gives a fair indication of their relative strength at this time.

Table 4

The Average Annual Amount, by value, of Textiles imported into the Town of New York, from Britain, France and Germany, 1829-1831.<sup>1</sup>

Article	from Great Britain £000. s.	from France £000. s.	from Germany £000. s.
Cloths & Kerseys	591.5	62.7	3.7
Other Woollen Mfres	432.9	60.3	16.2
Manufacture of Cotton	1114.9	172.9	105.0
Do. Silk	96.9	943.0	7.3
Do. Flax	242.3	57.5	37.2
Do. Hemp	52.1	---	---

1. Tables of the Revenue, Population and Commerce of the U.K. and its Dependencies, Part 11, p.617.

In many of the countries to which British woven goods were exported there was a domestic cloth industry. This was not everywhere the case; in places like Brazil and the British West Indies, important outlets for British textiles, there was probably a negligible amount of indigenous weaving. But in all the European countries, in the United States, and in the Eastern markets, the British weaver whose products were exported was frequently in competition with the indigenous weaver. In many of these countries - especially the European ones and the United States - the domestic industry received protection.<sup>1</sup> Also, a fact of some relevance to the question of competition, in many European countries hand-loom weaving only existed as a separate trade in the fancy trade. Plain weaving was carried on largely as a supplementary employment, or in conjunction with small-scale farming. Under such conditions, competition would tend to be sustained even under severe price competition. To use the economist's term, the supply of such labour would tend to be inelastic.

But in general the foreign competition which the trade faced was not, with the exception of one or two branches, very formidable.

It remains to consider the broad influences of the foreign trade, on the position of the hand-loom weaver at home. From

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1. In 1839 the only country pursuing a completely free trade policy was Switzerland. See Rep. 1839 p.114.



one point of view the existence of foreign markets would appear to have been beneficial to the hand-loom weavers as it would provide vents for their goods. This would be particularly the case after 1830 when the power-loom was increasing rapidly and making its competition felt in the hand-loom trade. The fact that the power-loom cloth found markets abroad mitigated to that extent the effects of its increased competition on the hand-loom weavers' income. It expanded the market and therefore helped to sustain prices.

But this is not a particularly illuminating way in which to view the place of foreign trade in the industry over the period as a whole, and especially in the earlier years. The year 1815 found Britain specialised in the production of textiles. There was already a considerable export trade; of long-standing in the case of wool, more recent in linen, and very recent in cotton. During the years of war when Continental countries had been cut off from supplies of raw cotton, and the pound sterling had been depreciated, the cotton industry had been stimulated to the point where a continuing high volume of exports was necessary simply to keep in employment large numbers of weavers in the industry. These men were committed to the trade and could not readily transfer themselves to any other occupation. Moreover their numbers were





rising. They were dependant on foreign markets in order to maintain even the meagre standard which they were enjoying.

One definite disadvantage of dependance on foreign markets may have been that foreign demand was possibly more unstable than home demand. Certain foreign markets were probably subject to a high degree of instability, and any sections of the trade that were especially dependant on these would suffer. There was a considerable decline in the total export of cotton manufactures between 1825 and 1826, and this was the cause of much distress among Scottish hand-loom weavers. But certain markets fell far more than the average. The decline in total exports was about 20%, but shipments to the U.S.A. fell by a third, and to another important market, Brazil, by nearly 40%.

In conclusion, something should be said on a point raised by Symons, one of the Scottish Hand-loom weavers Assistant Commissioners in 1839.<sup>1</sup> He points to the two years, 1836 and 1837, as showing an increased export of cotton yarn coupled with a fall in the export of cotton woven goods. This was said to be "proof of the progress of the competition of foreign weavers with our own," the implication being that the

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1. Rep. 1839, p.57.

export of yarn adversely affected the position of the British weaver. But merely to look at the movements of exports in a pair of years like this was quite misleading. It is true that yarn exports were rising rapidly: between 1815-19 and 1840-44 they rose nearly tenfold. But over the period as a whole exports of woven goods also increased considerably: between the same two sets of years they almost quadrupled. Hence the most that exports of yarn could be said to do was to slow down the rate of increase of exports of manufactured goods. Still, on a wider view, the export of yarn did increase the competition which the British hand-loom weaver had to meet. Up to the eighteen-thirties the most spectacular effect of machanization was to cheapen the cost of spinning. The export of yarns from British spinning mills meant that the benefits of this development were made available to the foreign weaver. He was enabled to participate in the increased demand for the services of the weaving trade consequent upon a fall in the total manufacturing costs, due to the mechanization of spinning. But in the later part of our period any contribution which this might be considered to make to the distress of the British hand-loom weaver was probably outweighed by the growing competition of the power-loom.

The assumption has generally been made that the introduction of the power-loom meant the end of the hand-loom. And clearly in the end this was so. But the remarkable feature of the depression of the hand trade is that the competition of the power-loom only began to be really felt when the trade was already in a very wretched state. The entry of the power-loom, on any considerable scale, comes late in the history of the decline of the hand-loom weaving industry, and much too late for it to be considered the sole, or even the main, cause of the decline. Obviously indeed there were several causes, of which the power-loom was one, all contributing to the same end, but it seems a mistaken view to think of the entry of the power-loom into the weaving trade as summarily disrupting a flourishing hand trade; it was already seriously depressed. Neither contemporary opinion nor present research bear out the view that the power-loom played any part in producing the wretched situation of the trade during the period 1815-1825.

Weaving by power really dates from the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. Cartwright's invention of 1785 in practice did not work. The credit of producing the first working



loom is attributed by Edward Barnes, the historian of the industry, to Mr. Robert Millar of Glasgow in 1798.<sup>1</sup> His improvements were incorporated in subsequent machines produced by Messrs. Radcliffe and Ross, Mr. Thomas Johnson, and Mr. H. Horrocks, all of Stockport, who between them devised various techniques to meet the early difficulties.<sup>2</sup>

1. There may be some doubt on this point. The Records of the Incorporation of Weavers in Glasgow, printed under the title of 'Old Glasgow Weavers', make the following statement---"The power loom was introduced to Glasgow in 1773, by Mr. James Louis Robertson of Dunblane, who set up two of them in Argyle Street, which were set in motion by a large Newfoundland dog performing the part of a gin-horse." But later we find, "John Robertson, a Pollockshaws power-loom tenter in several letters sent to the Glasgow Herald in January, and February 1871 stoutly contests the accuracy of this statement ... and says that a man named Adam Kinloch, whom he met in 1845, and who was then 85 years of age, "made the first two power-looms that ever were made in the world, and drove them with the use of a crank by his own hand, in a court off the Gallowgate in 1793." Old Glasgow Weavers. Edited by R. McEwan, 1905, pp. 131.
2. One stubborn problem was to find a fool-proof method of stopping the loom, when the weft thread broke or the shuttle was caught in the shed, without causing the sudden shock to damage the fabric or the loom. This difficulty was evidently not completely overcome until 1842. Another problem was to keep the warp dressed with starch (to bear the strain of the shuttle constantly flying across it) without having to employ a man for each loom so that there was no saving in cost. The hand-weaver performed this operation afresh about every yard and it took up time. "...the fine weavers must be good dressers, or else they cannot be good weavers." Rep. 1834, M.E. Q. 5881. The operation was cut out on the power-loom by dressing the warp by a "sizeing"- or "dressing"-machine before it was placed in the loom.

Nevertheless adoption of the power-loom was slow. "Both loom and sizeing machine had been brought to a comparative degree of perfection in 1805; but in 1813, eight years later, it is estimated that not more than 2,400 power-looms, with about 100 sizeing machines are in use in the whole country."<sup>1</sup>

Between 1813 and 1820 power-looms increased at a more rapid rate and by 1820 there were in England and Scotland together a total of 14,000 looms. The Table given below shows the increase in the number of power-looms between the years 1820 and 1835.

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1. William Fairbairn. The Rise and Progress of Manufactures and Commerce in Lancashire and Chesire. p. CCXLV.

Table 5

Numbers of Power-Looms in Operation, with Hand-Loom  
Equivalents, 1820-1835.

1 Year	2 England	3 Scotland	4 Ireland	5 Total	6 Hand-Loom <sup>4</sup> Equivalent
1820 <sup>1</sup>	12,150	2,000		14,150	28,000
1829 <sup>1</sup>	45,500	10,000		55,000	166,500
1833 <sup>2</sup>	85,009	14,970		99,979	300,000
1835 <sup>3</sup>	97,564	17,721	1,516	116,801	350,400

1. Given in E. Baines, 'History of the Cotton Manufacture'.  
The original source was a manufacturer and commentator on  
the cotton industry named Kennedy.
2. S.C. C.M.S. 1833. M.E.
3. As reported by the Factory Commissioners in 1835.
4. These figures are very approximate and are calculated  
on the following basis:

1820 1 Power-Loom = 2 Hand-loom

1829, 33, 35 1 Power-Loom = 3 Hand-loom

These ratios are based on statements by Baines Op.cit. p.235



In column 6 a rough figure has been given of the hand-loom equivalents of the power-looms in existence. If we recall that throughout our period the number of hand-looms in the cotton industry was between 200,000 and 250,000 it will be seen that in 1820 the Power-Loom figures are not important compared to the hand-loom capacity. Therefore at that time and probably up till about the year 1825 the distress in the hand-loom weaving industry was not due to the power-loom. It was most probably due to the combination of the over-supply of labour to the trade with falling prices for the finished products. By 1833 however, as the table shows, the growth of the power-looms had increased the hand-loom capacity by at least 100%, and therefore simply from the point of view of the supply of cotton goods, and regardless of their cost-reducing influences, they were bound to be affecting the position of the hand-loom by that time.

The power-loom by 1830 was perfectly able to produce successfully all kinds of plain fabrics, and some patterned. It could easily have taken over much of the hand-loom work and done it as well, if not better. According to Guest, the cloth made by the power-looms, "when seen by those manufacturers who employ hand-weavers at once excites admiration, and a consciousness that their own men cannot equal it."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Guest. History of the Cotton Manufacture p.46.

Even the best hand-weavers could not produce a cloth of entirely uniform evenness throughout, the reason being that a stronger or weaker blow with the lathe immediately alters the thickness of the cloth, and after an absence it would be impossible for a weaver to start off again with exactly the same strength of blow as the one with which he left off. In consequence of its evenness power-loom cloth became so popular that dishonest manufacturers sometimes stamped "power-loom" on hand-woven cloth. Yet the progress of the power-loom in the patterned trade was slow. As late as 1835 we find Baines writing, "...although this machine has for more than ten years been well adapted for weaving of all kinds of plain, silk, linen, woollen, and worsted goods, and all patterns of those fabrics not requiring more than 12 heddles and 12 sheds, and in some patterns upwards of 30 sheds, and working with one or two shuttles, yet it is comparatively little used in any of those manufactures."<sup>1</sup> It was still kept employed on plain cloths and calicoes and coarse cloths until the last years of our period.<sup>2</sup> The explanation can only lie in the extreme lowness of the hand-loom wages, coupled with the higher costs of weaving the fancy goods by

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1. E. Baines. History of the Cotton Manufacture 1835. p.239.

2. The power-loom did not compete at all in the woollen industry before 1839 and only a very little in the fancy cotton trade; in the muslin branch.

power-loom.

Nevertheless the fancy trade was not unaffected by the increasing power-loom production of plain cottons after 1830. In the first place although the power-loom did not compete directly with the harness weavers it did so indirectly by producing cheap cotton cloths as alternatives to their silks, and linens. For instance the use of linen-shirting was giving way to cotton-shirting. And in the second place the pressure of power-loom competition in the plain trade tended to drive more and more weavers into the fancy trade.<sup>1</sup> The result was that wages were low, and although not as low as those branches in direct competition with the power-loom they were very low indeed compared to those of other trades which demanded a comparable degree of skill. In this connection it might be pointed out that no wages were lower than those of the checked pullicate and gingham weavers with whom the power-loom did not come into competition at all.<sup>2</sup> The fact of the matter was that the existence of the power-loom in the cotton industry, reducing costs and increasing output yearly, was

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1. S.C. 1834. M.E. Qq.4371-4373.

2. This was a branch of the plain weaving which for long defied the power-loom though mastered with ease by young children. The main cause of the depression in this branch must be ascribed to that very fact, that it was tremendously overstocked by every kind of unskilled labour; men women and children.



affecting the whole of the textile trade, whether the power-loom was actively engaged in a particular branch or not.

Its effect upon the industry may be summed up as three-fold. Firstly it competed directly with the weaver who made plain cottons and lowered his wage accordingly. Secondly it reduced the demand for some weavers when the cloths they wove, such as linen shirtings, became superseded by more popular power-loom cloths. And thirdly it had the tendency to drive the intelligent weaver out of the plain trade altogether and into the fancy trade, where the weavers, though not in direct competition with the power-loom, were then faced with over-crowding. In short; it lowered the wages of some branches directly, and it must be regarded as indirectly lowering the wages of all, by placing on the market an alternative choice to hand-made goods, whether cotton, silk, linen or wool, of cheap well-produced cotton cloth.

Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the weight of contemporary informed opinion, both within the trade and without, was decidedly against attributing the whole of the depressed state of the industry after 1825 to the effects of the power-loom. And the conclusion reached by the <sup>Wec</sup>Commissioners after studying the evidence collected in 1835 bears this out. "Concluding their observations on

the subject of the Power-Loom Your Committee beg, again, to be distinctly understood that nothing can be further from their opinion than that the hand-loom weaver, in certain branches of the trade, can ultimately resist the effects produced by the introduction of the power-loom. All they have contended for, and that is supported by the Evidence before them, is that the power-loom of itself would never have been the cause of such immediate widespread misery and distress as that of which the hand-loom weavers now so reasonably complain. They repeat the opinion, that other causes, wholly apart and distinct from the power-loom, have tended to aggravate their difficulties, and that if they had had to contend with the power-loom alone, the difficulties, although they might have been sufficiently apparent, would have been greatly mitigated."<sup>1</sup>

One final comment might be added. It will be seen from columns 2 and 3 of Table 5<sup>2</sup> that the Power-loom expanded more rapidly in England than in Scotland after 1825. This of course cannot be held to have affected the total market for the Scottish hand-loom weaver's labour any the less, but it did mean that there were fewer opportunities of employment in the power factories for his family, and eventually for himself.

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1. Rep. 1835. Rep. p. XVI

2. Above p. 57.

Thus the slower rate of power-loom expansion after 1825 probably made the depression relatively more severe in Scotland.

One possible explanation of Scotland's lag in the application of power may lie in the high numbers of very small manufacturers in the trade, the "small corks", who though they could continue to employ the outworker or the hand-loom factory could not raise the necessary capital to instal machinery.

There was no hindrance of any kind to any man's setting up as a manufacturer provided he could purchase " a winding-machine and a warping-mill and get credit for a skip of yarn."<sup>1</sup> In the early flourishing days of cotton-weaving it had been by no means uncommon for a weaver to set aside from his wages sufficient within a few years to set-up as a master, and to hire out two or three looms to journeymen. From there he might easily progress to being a prosperous manufacturer. John Kegan (a retired muslin-manufacturer of Glasgow) said that more persons rose to wealth and eminence out of hand-loom

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1. *Rep.* 1834 M.E. Q.5670.



weaving than "all the other trades." "I could name 40 or 50 people who were hand-loom weavers who are now men of capital and character filling high situations. Two late Lord Provosts of Glasgow (Monteith and Dalgleish) were hand-loom weavers in my remembrance."<sup>1</sup> It must have been an encouraging picture, but it had unfortunate effects upon the trade. Hopes of successful enterprise, manoeuvring on little capital, drew many into the trade who had not the means to be there.<sup>2</sup> Their capital was small, they had no reserves, and were totally unable to meet the ups and downs of the trade. But small though these firms were, in size and scope of operation, their influence on the trade was said to be very great.<sup>3</sup> In any reduction of wages it was generally a small house that led the way, in any recession of trade it was generally the little houses that were the first to reduce

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1. M.E. 1834 Q.166.

2. "We have got a great number of manufacturers. A great many of them have little or no capital; they give out the work, which is the same fabric as the man above him, at 10 or 12 pc. lower; he goes to the market and undersells him who is above him; he that is above is under the necessity to come down to him and he that is below keeps at the same distance. The price of weaving is paid from 5s to 1s 6d lower than some other houses." Ibid. Q.1987.

3. "We have long considered that part of our grievance was caused by the steam-loom, and by the competition of foreign manufacturers; but we consider that a very trifling matter in comparison with the home competition that exists among our masters, and till there is some remedy for that we shall never be better." Rep. C.M.S. 1833, M.E. Q.11724.

wages.<sup>1</sup>

But more than this, and more serious, was the fact that the small houses frequently were seen to reduce wages when under no apparent compulsion from the state of the trade.<sup>2</sup> Wages sometimes fell quite unaccountably. And what started the fall was frequently the work of a very small manufacturer. His cheap goods<sup>3</sup> on the market threatened to undersell his neighbours and sooner or later houses would reduce wages to be able to compete at the lowered price. Nowhere was the spirit of competition, so characteristic of the age, more evident than in the reckless drive of these manufacturers

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1. "Those houses, having no large amounts of capital are frequently obliged to dispose of their goods under prime cost in order to carry on trade and reimburse themselves by a fall in the wages of the weavers?" "That is the case; they have not the power of reducing the price of the yarns; and they always fly to reducing the weavers' wages." Evidence of Mr. Robert Galloway, manufacturer of pullicates at Lanark. *Rep. 1834. M.E.Q. 2561.*
  2. "Is that circumstance within the sphere of your observation that the falls of wages have been sometimes capricious, that they have not been necessary according to the state of the market?" - "Yes I believe so; they have proceeded from the avariciousness of individuals, low-paying houses as they are called." "Do you agree with previous witnesses in attributing those capricious falls to what is termed home-competition?" "The home-competition is considerable; in my observation I have noticed that these people enter into business with little capital, and that they do perhaps as much business on 100 l. as they should do on £1,000; thereby they are the first to reduce the prices generally." *Rep. 1834 M.E. Q. 2558-9.*
  3. Cheap because they were frequently made from stolen weft. See below p. 70.



to undersell each other in the market, regardless of consequence.<sup>1</sup> Cloth became cheaper, and wages fell in a never-ending spiral. Excellent though this was for the population in general it was a very wretched state of affairs for the weavers and many of the manufacturers sympathised heartily but declared themselves powerless to stop a fall without putting themselves out of business.<sup>2</sup>

There was at the same time considerable variation in the trade between what one house paid and another, largely due to the difficulty of knowing what each house was paying for particular work at any one time.<sup>3</sup> This was one of the

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1. The weavers felt that the home-competition was particularly severe in their trade partly because they had no defence against it. They felt their isolation and their lack of combination very keenly in this connection. Also their lack of a general understanding of the state of trade was a great disadvantage to them. See their arguments in favour of Boards of Trade. Ch. VI. pp. 194-211.
  2. "Whilst things remain as they are the better disposed part of the manufacturers have no more control over this pest of trade and his country (the small manufacturer) than if he resided in the moon." From an appeal by weavers to the manufacturers and merchants of Manchester. Quoted in *Rep.* 1834 M.E. Q.5375.
  3. "I went through the city of Glasgow, probably in 100 warehouses on the 2nd of December (1834); not a single manufacturer said he could not give the price we demanded, a very small advance. It was not from foreign competition; the question which met us was, what is Mr. Such-a-one doing? If he pays it I will do it. I went into a warehouse employed in the trade, that is Mr. Watson's in Montrose St; not one inch of their cloth is consumed in Great Britain. He did not complain of foreign competition; he said what is such-a-one doing? and he rose his price of weaving. Not an inch of his goods is consumed in Great Britain. From that and other things we consider home-competition has been the principal cause of our ruin, to a certain extent." *Ibid.* Q.1987.



weaver's - and some manufacturers - strongest arguments in favour of Boards of Trade.<sup>1</sup> They claimed that the mutual ignorance of manufacturers and weavers as to what prices others were paying and receiving invariably worked to the detriment of the weaver. There may have been some truth in this in so far as wages were more likely to fall by mutual consent than to rise by mutual consent, but of course the real weakness in the weaver's position was in his lack of bargaining strength vis à vis the manufacturer.

Wages were sometimes not lowered directly, but indirectly by increasing the length of the web to be woven at the former price. Wages were traditionally paid by the yard<sup>2</sup> and not by the piece, but it seems that the unscrupulous master could give out a web stated on the ticket to be such and such a length when in reality it was several yards longer. In Dundee the length of hessian sheeting had been openly increased by 37 yards without a commensurate increase in wages.<sup>3</sup> John Adam, a linen weaver of Forfar, told the Committee that "when the 24-porter Osnaburg measured 143 yards it was keeled (measured) 120. I have seen it measure 160 yards and only keeled 120.

If the manufacturer did not attempt fraudulently to practice

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1. See Ch. VI. pp. 194-211.

2. <sup>Rep. on</sup> Petition of Journeymen Weavers 1811 p.4.

3. Rep. 1834. M.E. Q.3402.

upon the weaver what was the use of him deceiving him by his keels and his tickets?"<sup>1</sup> In Dundee the weavers were generally not paid by the yard but by the 'ell' and one of their difficulties was that there seems to have been no fixed length for the ell. This was annoying to the weavers as it laid them open to fraud and they were very anxious to have this point finally settled.<sup>2</sup>

Another type of fraud practiced upon the weaver by the small and precarious manufacturer is described in detail by James McEwan, a weaver of Perth, who was himself a victim of it. "There is home-competition going on at the present time at Perth, by those that make cambrics and umbrella ginghams, and one master has made another almost lay aside trade, by underselling him at the present time; and he is just stopping for a time to see how the other conducts himself. The one has been in operation these 16 years, the new competitor for only 3; and that is the one that has out-done the other. The practice in Perth is, a manufacturer will commence with a fabric of 12<sup>00</sup> umbrella gingham, at a medium not very stout or very light but in between them; he will reduce the wages

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1. Ibid. Q.3476. See also evidence of linen weaver of Aberdeen Lawrence Don. Ibid. Qq.5989-5993. The evidence for this fraudulent practice comes from the weavers on the East side, and seems to have existed mainly in the linen trade, though it was said to happen in cotton too.

Ibid. Q.5991.

2. Ibid. Q.q.3407-8.



for the web of 7 cuts 3s 6d, or 6d a cut; but when the house in London complains in any way about the lightness of the fabric, he will tell the weaver to put a spindle more weft upon the piece, but not a farthing more will he give him for the weaving, and the weavers become reduced in this way, although not nominally reduced; and he brings it up nearly to the old fabric at the close." "This is a kind of fraud practised upon the weaver?" - "It is clearly a fraud upon the weaver at the present time if a mutual agreement is not made. I engaged for 15 shots, that is 79 shots upon the inch; now the warehouse said that the agent in London was complaining upon the fabric being rather light; and he asked me to put on 84, that was 5 shots more upon the inch, and I asked him for 1d more, and he said he could not give it. Now I am under the obligation, having agreed to do so, of putting on the 16 shots."<sup>1</sup>

Frauds of this kind created ill-feeling in the trade, but without doubt the most serious form of dishonesty, and the most damaging to the trade, was the extensive traffic in stolen yarn. The villains of the piece here were the small manufacturers known as "small corks". These were men but lately risen from being operative weavers themselves, and usually employing only a few weavers, although some might have as

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1. Ibid. Qq.2946-7.



many as 200 on their books. Their peculiar distinction was that they did not sell their goods in the regular market but direct to cash warehouses or commission agents. And a further distinction was that in the great majority of cases they worked with stolen weft.<sup>1</sup>

Embezzlement of weft was very widespread.<sup>2</sup> This was well-known in the trade. And it was equally obvious that most of the small houses worked with it. What is less certain is whom they got the weft from. Many witnesses questioned on the point were sure that the weavers frequently succumbed to the temptation to pass on a spindle of two of weft. The Procurator-Fiscal of Maybole who may be supposed to have known what he was talking about quotes many examples of the way in which the weft was disposed of and the extraordinary

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1. Rep.1839. p.60.

2. "Is the amount of property stolen, purloined, or embezzled from cotton-spinning and manufacturing concerns in the west of Scotland, great or small?" "It is very great, and to give some idea of the extent in which this traffic is carried on, I may state, without fear of contradiction, that some extensive manufacturing establishments in Glasgow suffer loss, in this way, to the extent of £1,000 per annum at least; and to my certain knowledge the purchase of goods made partly from embezzled materials, by two establishments in Glasgow, amount annually to upwards of 31,000 l.; and these purchases are made generally at a price from 10 to 15 per cent below what the same description of goods can be made by a regular manufacturer." Answer of Captain Jeffrey, Superintendent of Police in Gorbals of Glasgow to questionnaire on Embezzlement. Rep. 1839. p.90.

difficulty there was in bringing the offenders to justice. This was partly due to the apathy of the manufacturers, which in turn arose from the difficulty and expense of obtaining a conviction. And even if a conviction were obtained most likely ~~both~~ fine or weft, or both, would be unrecoverable.<sup>1</sup> Also there was the real difficulty of identifying stolen weft.<sup>2</sup> Apparently in the Procurator-Fiscal's area, (Maybole), weft known to be stolen circulated quite freely and was not only sold to agents and small corks but to private families and stocking-makers.<sup>3</sup> He himself had no hesitation in naming the weavers and their families as the main culprits. "The embezzlement by winders not connected with the weaver's family is, I am sure, very trifling; while,

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1. See a number of convictions submitted to Symons by the Chief Constable for Ayrshire. Rep.1839, p.93. Also Ibid pp.85-92.
  2. "Now do not the weavers sometimes embezzle a part of their materials?" Yes, that is frequently the case."  
 "Is it not possible for the manufacturers to prevent it as the law now stands?" "We have not found it so. The stolen materials may be siezed by officers --- but the magistrates cannot convict unless you swear to the property. Now, every gentleman here, acquainted with the business, knows you cannot swear to the property; you may be satisfied it is yours, but you cannot positively swear to it, therefore the magistrates will not convict."  
 Rep. 1834. M.E. Qq.2362 and 2363.
  3. "It has, for instance, of late become very common for private families to purchase Thibet yarn from weavers employed in the manufacture of shawls, for the purpose of making stockings, and from the fine texture of this material, it is preferred to silk and looks equally well. A great deal of it is bought in this way by private families." Rep. 1839. p.88.



on the other hand, the embezzlement by the weaver or his wife and family is enormous.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand a good many witnesses seemed certain that the weavers themselves had little part in the traffic.<sup>2</sup> They declared that the thieves were the winders. An Agent writes in to say that the pilferers "are the most abandoned characters, (principally those employed to wind weft), who will not work if they can find the means of living otherwise."<sup>3</sup> And a manufacturer questioned on the point gives the firm opinion that embezzlement is the work of the winders of pirns; "weavers seldom know anything of it." The obstacle to accepting this statement is that so frequently the winders were the wives of the weavers. Perhaps it is best to leave it

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1. Evidence of the Procurator-Fiscal of Maybole Rep. 1839, p.85. This is corroborated by the evidence of the Chief Constable for Ayrshire: "From my own observations, I think it is the weaver who embezzles more than the pirn-winders; as I have seen, in searches made in some of their houses, two and sometimes three, webs or chains, and not one pound of weft to work the web; and likewise, the quantity of coops or pirns, which never goes into any person's possession but the weavers, which has been seized, shows that the weaver is the principal purloiner of cotton yarn." Ibid. p.94.
  2. There is this equally strong evidence given by a manufacturer in 1834; "the manufacturers count the weft which they deliver to the weavers, and when not by count it is by weight; consequently it will appear to the Committee that the weaver has not the chance of embezzling in the same degree with warehousemen, warpers, and other individuals who have free access to the materials without any restraint being imposed on them." Rep.1834, M.E. Q.3360.
  3. Rep. 1839. p.92.



that embezzlement by weaver and family took place on a very large scale. But it is perhaps only fair to the memory of the weaver, if not to his wife, to add that the whole course of embezzlement was of the greatest possible disadvantage to him and he must have known it. In the first place he would be fined if his web was thin. But secondly and worse, his wages in general would be lowered because the small manufacturer could, at the price at which he could buy stolen weft, undersell the regular manufacturer.<sup>1</sup> Some large houses dealt almost exclusively with these small manufacturers because they could buy the goods made up a great deal cheaper than they could make them themselves.

The allegations of embezzlement did the weavers' cause harm and it benefited a few only at the expense of the many. The witnesses of 1834 were unanimous in wishing to see an end to it.<sup>2</sup> There were some who felt that something should

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1. "Has the traffic in embezzled materials a tendency to reduce wages?" "Yes greatly so. A weaver will steal yarn from me which has cost 3s, and he will sell it to one of these dealers at 1s per pound -- he will bring that cloth into the market, and (sell) in the market at a low price, and will, in flat times especially, give a sort of currency to the market; and therefore it has a very serious effect in reducing wages. It is a very great annoyance to the honest manufacturers." Rep. 1834, M.E. Q.2367.
  2. "Are all respectable manufacturers and weavers inclined to have this state of things put an end to?" "I think the respectable weavers even more than the manufacturers. I think they are more deeply concerned. Ibid. Q.2368.

be done to check embezzlement only after relief had first been afforded to the weavers but the more general feeling was that embezzlement should be stopped by whatever means possible.<sup>1</sup> It did nothing but harm to the trade, and encouraged the competition among the manufacturers at home, which in turn lowered the weaving prices and kept the weavers' wages on a continuous downward trend.

It must finally be said however that the competition of the manufacturers at home, ruinous as was its immediate effect upon wages, was only possible because of the superfluity of hands to choose from. This competition was the most apparent cause of the depression but it was in fact only a consequence of what I take to be the primary cause, namely a great excess of labourers over the natural demand. On this

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1. "I consider it absolutely necessary that parties guilty of this crime should be prosecuted at the public expense, in the same way as those guilty of crimes of a similar nature. Until this is done there never will be any effectual stop put to the too general practice of stealing weft, and selling it again at half its value, to small manufacturers, who are thus enabled in some measure to undersell capitalists who are desirous of keeping up the wages of the weavers at a fair rate, in so far as in their power to do so." Rep.1839. p.92.
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question it may fairly be said that without pursuing "the fetish of the single cause", and while fully acknowledging the many factors that contributed to the depression of the Hand-loom Weaving Industry, - most of which have been considered here, - yet it seems entirely certain that by far the most significant and conclusive of these factors was the unlimited supply of labour, which, from whatever sources it came, overwhelmed the trade with numbers far exceeding what could ever conceivably be called a natural or a reasonable demand.



## CHAPTER 111

### WAGES IN THE TRADE

Wages in the hand-loom weaving industry declined steadily throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

J.C. Symons in his excellent report on the industry in the South of Scotland gives a table showing the decline in wages in the various branches of the cotton industry over the years 1810-1838. This table is quoted in full below as it is the most authoritative source of evidence on the state of wages in the trade during these years.<sup>1</sup>

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1. For examples of wages paid in particular branches of the trade see tables. 2-6, and Table 1 in the Appendix.

Table 1

Average weekly earnings of hand-loom weaving from 1810-1838, according to description of work and relative skill of weaver.<sup>1</sup>  
 As collated from manufacturers' books and reported by Assistant Hand-Loom Weavers Commissioners 1839.<sup>2</sup>

Year	1		2		3		4		5		6	
	Glasgow Ginghams & Fulli- cates		Glasgow Plain Muslins		Glasgow Fancy Muslins & Silk Gauzes		Paisley Shawls		Zebras & Dresses		Wollen Stuffs Plaids etc.	
	High Rate	Low	High Rate	Low	High Rate	Low	High Rate	Low	High Rate	Low	High Rate	Low
1810-1816	24/6	17/-	17/2	13/6	20/-	10/6	26/6	23/-	15/-	9/11		
1816-1820	13/5	10/-	14/6	9/-	18/-	10/3	24/-	17/6	15/-	10/5		
1821	12/2	9/6	14/5	9/-	18/-	10/3	24/6	13/10	12/6	8/7		
1822	12/2	9/6	13/11	8/9	16/6	10/3	24/6	13/6	11/-	6/3		
1823	12/2	9/6	12/5	8/3	15/9	10/3	24/6	12/6	11/-	6/11		
1824	12/2	9/6	12/10	8/6	14/-	10/-	24/-	12/-	11/6	7/4		
1825	10/-	7/6	15/-	9/-	13/-	9/6	25/6	13/-	12/8	8/10		
1826	8/2	6/6	9/5	7/2	12/6	9/-	16/9	9/6	7/-	4/9		
1827	10/-	7/6	8/11	6/9	11/3	8/6	16/9	9/6	10/6	7/7		
1828	8/5	6/6	9/2	7/-	11/3	8/6	12/6	9/-	8/6	5/6		
1829	8/-	6/6	7/11	6/3	11/3	8/6	11/6	8/9	8/9	5/8		
1830	7/6	6/-	6/5	5/3	10/6	7/9	12/6	9/6	8/-	6/3	18/-	15/-
1831	7/6	6/-	6/5	5/6	10/6	7/9	13/6	10/6	8/-	6/9	18/-	15/-
1832	7/-	5/9	6/9	4/2	10/6	7/6	12/2	9/9	8/-	5/6	18/-	15/-
1833	6/6	5/3	6/6	4/3	10/6	7/6	13/6	10/2	8/6	7/8	17/-	14/-
1834	7/3	6/6	8/1	5/1	10/6	7/4	15/6	9/8	8/-	6/10	15/-	13/-
1835	7/9	6/8	8/2	5/9	10/9	7/4	15/6	10/8	9/-	7/2	14/-	12/-
1836	7/6	5/9	8/10	6/6	10/6	7/-	15/2	12/-	8/-	7/6	16/9	12/-
1837	6/6	4/3	7/9	4/6	9/6	5/-	13/2	8/4	8/6	8/-	16/9	11/-
1838	7/-	4/6	7/6	4/6	9/6	6/-	13/2	6/6	7/6	6/3	16/9	11/-

1. In each description of work a high rate and a low rate of earnings is given; the high rate being the average weekly earnings of skilled weavers on the best work; the low rate being the average weekly earnings of inferior weavers on inferior work.
2. Source: The Table is based on one given by J.C. Symons, Asst. Hand-Loom Weavers Commissioner in his Report of 1839. See Reports of Asst. Hand-Loom Weavers' Commissioners 1839, p.15.

While these figures are in themselves striking enough evidence of the great decline in wage-rates it seems possible that even so the rates quoted are too high. It has been possible to check the figures given by Symons for the year 1834 with those given by witnesses before the Select-Committee of that year.<sup>1</sup> Table 2, given below, places the two sets of figures side by side.

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1. Symons' figures are quoted from manufacturers only. The figures for 1834 were given by both manufacturers and weavers.



Table 2

Average weekly earnings according to description of work, as reported by various witnesses before the Select Committee of 1834, set beside earnings quoted by Symons 1839.

Report	1 Glasgow Gingham & Pullicates s....d	2 Glasgow Plain Muslins s....d	3 Paisley Shawls s....d	4 Zebras & Harness s....d
1839 <sup>1</sup>	6/10 <sup>1</sup>	6/7	8/10	7/5
1834	5/ 0 <sup>3</sup> <sup>2</sup>	5/0 <sup>3</sup>	8/ 4 <sup>4</sup>	7/10 <sup>5</sup>

1. Symons' figures have been arrived at by striking an average of the high and low rates given in Table 1 above.
2. See Rep. 1834 M.E. Q.2562, evidence of Robt. Galloway, weaver, and Q.2668, evidence of Thos. Mallock, weaver. Also see Q.1314, evidence of Wm. Craig, manufacturer. Craig stated that:-

"the average rate of wages for several years back has not been, perhaps, above 4/6 - 5/6 a week; the gross wages not above 5/0."

3. See Ibid. Q.675, evidence of Hugh Mackenzie, weaver, and Q.1282, evidence of Wm. Buchanan, weaver.
4. See Ibid. Q.890, evidence of Jas. Orr, weaver, but C.p. Q.2423, evidence of Jas. Stalker, weaver, who gives a figure of 6/9 for corresponding work in Perth. Orr's figure referred to Glasgow and Paisley where all high-class work of this description was carried on. In terms of value of output this was a very small group.
5. See Ibid. Q.2332, evidence of Thos. Paul, but C.p. Q.1783, evidence of Thos. Davidson, manufacturer, who gives a figure of 5/0.

This point is further borne out by a table of wages handed in by William Craig, manufacturer of gingham and pullicates, to the Select Committee in 1834. This table is given below, with Symons' figures alongside for comparison.

Table 3

A comparison of average weekly earnings in the weaving of gingham and pullicates, as calculated by J.C. Symons, Asst. Hand-Loom Weavers' Commissioner, with those reported by a witness to the Select Committee of Enquiry 1834.<sup>1</sup>

Year	Earnings reported <sup>2</sup> by Asst. Commissioner	Earnings reported ed by witness
	s...d	s...d
1821	9/6	9/ 1 $\frac{1}{2}$
1822	9/6	7/10 $\frac{1}{2}$
1823	9/6	7/10 $\frac{1}{2}$
1824	9/6	8/ 9 $\frac{3}{4}$
1825	7/6	6/11 $\frac{1}{4}$
1826	6/6	6/ 3 $\frac{3}{4}$
1827	7/6	6/ 3 $\frac{3}{4}$
1828	6/6	6/ -
1829	6/6	4/ 5 $\frac{1}{4}$
1830	6/-	4/ 9
1831	6/-	4/ 9
1832	5/9	4/ 1 $\frac{1}{2}$
1833	5/3	4/ 5 $\frac{1}{4}$
1834	6/6	5/ 0 $\frac{3}{4}$

1. Figures prepared by weavers and handed in by Wm. Craig, manufacturer, Ibid. p.126.
2. Figures calculated by J.C. Symons, as shown in this column, are rates earned by average inferior weavers on inferior work, and are given by him as an average minimum. See Reports of Asst. Hand-Loom Weavers' Commissioner, 1839, p.15.

From a comparison of these two tables it can be seen that the average wages quoted by Craig are in every case lower than the wages of inferior weavers quoted by Symons.

And when it is borne in mind that one half of the weaving population was engaged on this class of work,<sup>1</sup> and that the country wages were lower than the Glasgow wages, it seems very probable that the great majority of the weavers were rather worse off than the Assistant Commissioner's table indicates.

The wages of linen-weaving are dealt with by the Assistant Commissioner, Dr. Harding, who produced the Report on the East of Scotland in 1839. This is a much less comprehensive report than Symons', and it does not treat the question of wages nearly so widely nor so well. The following table, however, has been compiled from evidence taken by Dr. Harding, mostly from the books of manufacturers.

Table 4  
Average weekly earnings in the weaving of linens in 1838.<sup>1</sup>

Harness work and Damasks		Sailcloths, canvas bagging etc.		Osnaburgs.	
<sup>2</sup> 1st class	<sup>2</sup> 2nd class	1st class	2nd class	1st class	2nd class
s...d 12/3	s....d 8/9	s....d 10/-	s....d 8/6	s....d 7/6	s....d 4/-

1. Taken from the Appendix to Report of J.D. Harding. See Reports of Asst. Hand-Loom Weavers' Commissioner pp.198-212. (passim).
2. 1st class refer to rate of earning of the best hands, 2nd class to that of "old and inferior workers".

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1. See Ch. 1. p. 9.



Dr. Harding quotes the decline in wages from 1824-1838 in the weaving of osnaburgs,<sup>1</sup> in a table which was furnished to him by a Forfar manufacturer, Mr. David Littlejohn. Alongside this I have placed a table handed in by a Forfar weaver, John Adam, to the Select Committee of 1834.

Table 5

A comparison of average weekly earnings of linen weavers in Forfar as reported by a manufacturer and a weaver.<sup>1</sup>

Year	Rate of earnings reported by a manufacturer. <sup>2</sup>	Rate of earnings reported by a weaver. <sup>3</sup>
	s...d	s...d
1824	12/-	11/-
1825	11/-	11/-
1826	8/-	6/6
1827	9/-	6/6
1828	10/-	8/-
1829	8/-	6/6
1830	8/-	6/-
1831	8/-	6/-
1832	7/-	5/6
1833	8/-	6/3
1834	8/-	6/-

1. Rates are for weaving of 24 Porter Osnaburgh.
2. These rates furnished by David Littlejohn, manufacturer, to J.D. Harding, Asst. Hand-Loom Weavers' Commissioner, See Rep. 1839, p.210.
3. See Select Committee on Hand-Loom Weavers, 1834, M.E. Q.3515, evidence of John Adams, weaver.

While it is true that there were considerable variations in rates paid by manufacturers,<sup>2</sup> and these findings cannot be regarded as conclusive because there is no evidence

1. A cheap linen fabric comparable to the gingham and pullicate class in cotton weaving.
2. This was one of the weaver's strongest arguments in favour of Boards of Trade. See below Ch. VI. pp.194-211.

that witness Adams worked for manufacturer Littlejohn, yet what the witness says of the rates received for weaving this fabric seems to reinforce the point made earlier that the figures given by the manufacturers to the Assistant Commissioners were probably somewhat higher than those actually being received by their employees.<sup>1</sup>

A study of the wages in the various branches of the industry leads to the conclusion that no connection existed between the texture or value of the fabric and the weaver's wage. The price of labour depended on two factors : strength and skill. Where either or both existed the supply of labour was proportionately narrowed, and its price raised; where the skill and strength required was small the wages were low. Of the two factors, the first, strength, seems to have been the more powerful element in the price of wages. Thus cheap coarse cloths, like canvas bagging and sail-cloth, which required great strength in weaving because of their width and weight, earned the weaver a higher wage than even the patterned fabrics on the harness looms requiring great skill and ingenuity.

A table has been compiled to illustrate this point and is given below.

1. "What are the average wages of a good weaver in Forfar?"  
 - "The very best weaver in Forfar might get about 8s. clear; but it is only strong stout men that can make that sum; the average wages are about 6s. a week".  
 Rep. 1834. M.E. Q.3515.

Table 6

Average weekly earnings of hand-loom weavers in 1838, according to material, description, and class of work as reported by Assistant Hand-Loom weavers' Commissioners, 1839.

Class of work	SILKS	Description of work	Wage <sup>2</sup>		WOLLENS	Description of work	Wage		COTTONS	Description of work	Wage		LINENS	Description of work	Wage	
			High	Low			High	Low			High	Low			High	Low
			s..d	s..d			s..d	s..d			s..d	s..d			s..d	s..d
1		Broad shawls Damas Broad velvets				Broad carpets	s..d	s..d		Fine wide shawls	s..d	s..d		Damas table cloths	s..d	s..d
			10/6	6/-			13/-	11/-			10/6	6/-			12/6	8/9
11		None				Blankets				None				Sail cloths canvas bagging etc	10/-	8/6
			---	---			16/6	11/-			---	---		Cambrics napkins	8/6	---
111		Patterned work	9/6	6/6		None	---	---		Fine book muslins	8/-	--		Narrow sheeting Coarse Cambrics	7/6	4/-
1V		Plain silks	7/6	4/6		Tertans <sup>3</sup>	12/-	9/6		Pull- icates Ginghams	7/-	4/6				

1. Classes as distinguished by J.C. Symons; Asst. Hand-loom weavers' Commissioner; viz: I, requiring strength and skill; 11, requiring strength alone; 111, requiring skill alone; IV, requiring neither much strength nor skill, see Assistant Commissioners' Report 1839.
2. "Wage" signifies weekly earnings. In each case the "high" wage is the earnings of an average good worker on work of that description and class; the "low" wage is the earnings of an average inferior worker on similar work. Sources: For Silks, woollens, Cottons, Report of J.C. Symons, Esq.; Asst. Hand-loom weavers' Commissioner, 1839; For Linens, Report of J.D. Harding, Esq., Asst. Hand-loom weavers' Commissioner, 1839. This figure is possibly too high.
3. This figure is possibly too high.



It will be clearly seen that the highest rates of wages in each branch of the industry are paid for the class of work which requires both strength and skill; and that within this class the highest rates go to work requiring a greater proportion of strength. Thus broad carpets are paid at a higher rate than shawls and damasks, not because of the intrinsic value of the articles themselves, nor because of the skill required in weaving, but because of the width and weight of the fabric woven.

It will be noticed that the woollen industry, although conforming to the general principle outlined above, shows a uniformly higher rate of wages for all grades of work than the other three branches of the industry. This extraordinary difference between the wages in the cotton and the woollen districts is one of the most striking features of the hand-loom industry of this time. While the cotton areas of the west, south-west, and centre of Scotland were in grave decline, the woollen weaving area of South-East Scotland was exceedingly thriving. The wages of the woollen weavers in Galashiels, Hawick, etc., were more than 100 per cent higher than those of cotton weavers in the same area. Symons gives an interesting piece of evidence which bears this out. At Galashiels he found the wages

ranged from 12s to 17s per week. At Inverleithan, ten miles further on, a branch factory weaving the same kind of fabrics, (trouser stuffs, woollen tartans etc) paid similar wages. But at Peebles, only six miles from Inverleithan, he found the average rate of wages to be 6s clear at the most. The fabric woven was muslins. On being told that three or four of these Peebles cotton weavers had been admitted to the woollen factory at Inverleithan he went back there and sought them out. They were employed on lower wages than the regular woollen weavers, but even so they made 11s-6d per week which was almost 100 per cent more than they made at Peebles.

The Inverleithan factory was a small one and Symons enquired whether cotton workers were admitted to the woollen factories of Galashiels but was told that the Galashiels weavers would not permit it.<sup>1</sup> He suspected that the manufacturers themselves were not in favour of this either as they feared that if they allowed wages to fall, as in the cotton trade, prices would fall also and their profits with them.

The causes of the high wages in the woollen industry are not wholly clear, being generally put down to the great

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1. Rep. 1839, p.56.

demand throughout the country for woollen stuffs.<sup>1</sup> Symons makes the point that, "The exceeding difference of the wages earned even among the hand-loom weavers by those employed on cottons and those on woollens is another proof of the power over wages which the possession of machinery by the master gives to the artisan"<sup>2</sup>. In the woollen districts most of the looms belonged to the manufacturer and the weaving was done in factories.

The extreme steadiness of the woollen wages over a long period, however, seems to be mainly accounted for by the absence of two factors which were seriously affecting the cotton industry. The first was that the East of Scotland was largely free from the great influxes of unskilled Irish who made their way into the weaving industry of the West. One of the main conclusions of this investigation is that the hand-loom weaving industry in Scotland was brought low mainly from the excess of hands in the trade.<sup>3</sup> In escaping this the woollen industry of the South-East very largely escaped the fate that overtook the cotton industry of the West.

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1. "There is a greatly increased demand, owing, perhaps to fashions for woollen goods, Ibid. p.59.

2. Ibid. p.55.

3. See above, Ch. 11,



And secondly, the woollen manufacture was very largely exempt from the foreign competition with which the cotton and silk manufacture contended.<sup>1</sup> The competitive power of British woollens in overseas markets was relatively stronger. Finally, the cost of the raw material, wool, was greater than that of cotton, and this may have tended to ward off the speculator with little capital, the "small cork" who was the bane of the cotton industry.

The woollen branch was, however, only a very small part of the hand-loom weaving industry, not employing 10% of the total looms.<sup>2</sup> With the exception of this branch of the trade the main conclusions which can be drawn from the foregoing evidence are that the rate of wages in the main branch of the hand-loom weaving industry, the cotton trade, was extremely low,<sup>3</sup> and showing a steady decline. A similar trend, though with very slightly higher rates, is to be observed in the silk and the linen industry.

The total amount earned in any one weaver's family would depend of course not only on the branch of the trade

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1. See above Ch. 11 pp. 42-52.

2. See above Ch. I. Table 1A. pp. 7-8.

3. Wages of country weavers were 5% lower than Glasgow weavers, for whom figures have been given (table 1) Cp. Kinross where the average weekly wages were:

Cottons (pullicates) 1st class 4s.6d. 2nd class 3s.  
Woollens 14s.3d.

Rep. 1839, p. 212.

The difference in wages was due to the extra expense of agency; although in some cases the weavers seem to have paid the agency and received the reduced rate besides.

and the description of fabric on which he himself was working, but also on the earnings of any other members of his family at the loom.

On this question there is a considerable difference to be found between the cotton and woollen trades. The weaving of most woollen cloths, and of all the broad cloths and carpets woven in factories, was a trade confined altogether to men. Women and children were wholly excluded.

On the other hand, in the cotton trade in particular, and also to a lesser extent in the linen and silk trades, according to the strength and skill required in each, the weaver's children were able to weave plain cloths at quite an early age.<sup>1</sup> His wife might also weave, or make a small sum weekly winding the pirns.<sup>2</sup> But even so it does not seem likely that at best it would amount to a good woollen weaver's wage, and the disadvantages of over-stocking the cotton trade in this way with women's and children's labour

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1. "The comparative facility with which children of from 10 to 12 years of age can earn a subsistence on the loom, induces parents, particularly weavers, to give a preference to this trade without considering that they are voluntarily over-stocking the labour market."  
Evidence of James Cleland, Esq., L.L.D. quoted in Rep. 1839, p. 83, Cp. also the 'weavers rhyme' which used to be sung at choir practices:

The weaver said unto his son  
The night that he was born:  
My blessing on your curly pow;  
You'll gang wi' pirns the morn.'

2. The average amount earned by winding pirns did not exceed 2s. 6d. per week.

reacted very unfortunately on the lives of the cotton weaver and his children. Moreover, clearly only a proportion of the cotton weavers with families of the right age, could be in a position to enjoy these supplementary earnings, and while it is not now possible to determine exactly what this proportion was it is possible from the evidence given to form an opinion.

The difficulty here arises that there was some difference of opinion on this point between Symons, one of the Assistant Commissioners, and Mickson, a Commissioner. From a consideration of the care and thoroughness which Symons gave to his investigation, compared to the much more cursory nature of Mickson's Report, I am inclined to give more weight to Symons' impressions on this point. But in neither case can it be regarded as really more than impression because no country-wide survey of the weaving population was made to elucidate this point.<sup>1</sup>

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1. At Eaglesham, where such a census was taken, rather more than a quantity of the weaving population fell into the group of four or more dependants supported by one wage-earner. Rep. 1839. p.5.

According to a census taken by Symons in Glasgow in 1838 there were, on average, 1.8 looms per family. This means that a majority of families had the earnings of more than one loom. Glasgow, however, was predominantly a cotton weaving centre and the ratio of looms might not be so high over the country as a whole. Rep. 1839. p.4.



It was a very generally held view in the country at the time that the hand-loom weaver, though ill-paid himself, had a source of income in his family which was not the case in other trades. Symons' findings indicate that this view was exaggerated, in that it by no means referred to the weaving population as a whole. As moreover the looms worked by women and children were almost invariably engaged on the cheapest forms of work, it is unlikely that the collective earnings of any but a very large family would amount to any considerable sum. In any case, such supplementary earnings as a weaver received from his children's work were available to any tradesman who put his children out to work, and a great many in fact did put their young children to weaving, even though they were not weavers themselves. Most children of working class parents began work early and contributed to the support of the home. The only real difference between weaving and other trades in this respect seems to be that in the weaving trade the father was able to employ his child at home instead of sending him out to work.

Below are printed from specimens of family earnings given by Symons.

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Table 7

Specimens of collective earnings of weavers' families,  
as reported by J.C. Symons, Assistant Hand-Loom Weavers'  
Commissioner.<sup>1</sup>

	Net weekly wages.		
	£	S	D.
<b>No.1 Man, wife &amp; four children:</b>			
Father, weaving 15 <sup>00</sup> shawl, with second son drawing for him	-	12	6
First son, 14 yrs, weaving 14 <sup>00</sup> pullicate	-	3	10
Third son, 9 yrs, at school	-	-	-
Daughter, 17 yrs, embroidering	-	4	6
Wife, winding pirns	-	2	2
Total per week	1	3	-
Average per head	-	3	10
<b>No.2 Man, wife &amp; five children:</b>			
Father, weaving 17 <sup>00</sup> book muslin	-	7	6
First son, 11 yrs, weaving 12 <sup>00</sup> check	-	3	4
Daughter in factory	-	3	6
Three children, young	-	-	-
Wife, time partially occupied with children, winding	-	1	10
Total per week	-	16	2
Average per head	-	2	4
<b>No.3 Man, wife, &amp; two children:</b>			
Man, weaving 15 <sup>00</sup> gingham	-	5	11
Wife, winding	-	2	-
Two young children	-	-	-
Total per week	-	7	11
Average per head	-	2	-
<b>No.4 Man, wife, &amp; five children</b>			
Father, weaving muslin	-	5	-
Eldest daughter (sick) winding	-	1	-
Four young children	-	-	-
Wife, winding	-	1	2
Total per week	-	7	2
Average per head	-	1	1

1. Report, 1839, pp.7-8

The first and last examples are extreme cases of prosperity and poverty, but the second and third are offered by Symons as representative of the wages and distribution of labour among the cotton weavers.

Hickson in his own Report disagrees with Symons' findings, saying that he has not seen any reason to believe that "weavers with young families, in England or Scotland, form a large proportion of the body".<sup>1</sup> But one may take leave to doubt whether Hickson had really seen enough of the matter to make such a sweeping statement. His tour of the whole weaving districts of England and Scotland was confined to three months, much of which must have been taken up in travelling. Very little time was actually devoted to interrogation of the weavers themselves. From the evidence of the weavers and other witnesses it does not seem that there had been as yet any noticeable drift by the young men away from the trade. Entry into other trades was frequently made very difficult for a weaver.<sup>2</sup> It seems likely therefore that the proportion of families with young children in the weaving trade would be much the same as in any other trade.

It is true that as a weaver's children grew up their earnings were added to the family budget but as he himself

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1. Hickson's Report p.12.

2. See below Ch. II., p. 35.



grew older his wages declined. In an industry where strength counted so greatly the earnings of the very young and the very old were much the same.<sup>1</sup> And when it is borne in mind that weaving was a trade which, because of the lack of air and exercise, was enfeebling to the constitution, it is probable that men were "old" long before their due time. Mickson, who says that he felt most sympathy for the older weavers, refers to them as "family men above the age of 40, too much advanced in life, or too infirm of constitution, or too fixed in their habits, to think of changing their trade for a better".<sup>2</sup>

On the question of 'collective earnings' therefore, and the possibility of a weaver, as distinct from other tradesmen, being considerably better off than his wage-rate indicates, there does not seem to be any substantial evidence to lead to this conclusion. On the contrary, about half of the total numbers of looms were worked by women and children. But these were almost without exception engaged on the cheapest forms of work, where neither strength nor skill was required. The individual contributions made to the family earnings by these looms were small sums only. It appears that the

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1. "3rd class, old people and children, 3s.2d" (Averages of weaving pullicates furnished by G.L. Cornfute, Esq., to Dr. Harding.) Rep.1839, p.204.

2. Mickson's Report p.27.

average weaver's family contained four persons.<sup>1</sup> But by no means all families were in a position to use the labour of the wife and children. Finally, as the children grew to working age the head of the family's working power declined, and his wages accordingly. So that of the group enjoying 'collective earnings', probably a high proportion of heads of families were on the lower rate of wages. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that on the whole, except for a favoured few, the collective earnings of the cotton and plain linen weaver did not approach the single earnings of the woollen weaver, or of the comparable worker in other trades.<sup>2</sup>

The point is sometimes made that the weaver had sources of income other than weaving. Hickson suggests that field-work was an alternative. This seems to have been the case among the weavers of Northern Ireland, but not in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> Young strong men weaving in the country districts may well have augmented their earnings in harvest time, but it seems unlikely that this could have been the case, say, in Glasgow.

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1. Rep. 1839, p.5.

2. See Appendix. Table 2.

3. In Northern Scotland 'customer weavers', and families weaving for their own use only, combined it with farming. Also in a few country districts like Auchterarder where wages were very low it was usual to help in the field at harvest time. But it was not general. All the evidence refutes the idea that it was possible to combine weaving for a wage with any other work.

The weavers worked very long hours,<sup>1</sup> and even had they had the strength they certainly would not have had the time. No witness that I have come across mentions this, and Symons himself says, at the close of his intensive enquiries, "The great bulk of the regular weavers of Scotland subsist entirely by the loom, and engage in no other pursuits; the only exception I am aware of, exists at Largs, where the weavers derive considerably higher earnings in summer from fishing and boat-letting, than from the looms, and where the looms are generally unemployed except in winter". "This is partially the case on the coast at watering places, but seldom elsewhere, among the regular weavers".<sup>2</sup>

The wages of the hand-loom weaver working at home were lower than the wages of the weaver working in a hand-loom factory or 'shop'. This fact has already been noted in connection with the woollen workers, whose wages were high, and whose work was nearly all done in factories, because of the cost and size of looms necessary for making such things as blankets or carpets. But it is equally striking to note that the cotton weaver also, when in the hand-loom factory, could often average nearly double what the weaver made on the same cotton fabric when woven at home, and this despite

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1. See below Table 9.

2. Rep.1839, p.5.



the fact that the rate of payment was lower in the factory.<sup>1</sup>

The manufacturers explained the difference in wages by pointing to the regular hours of the factories compared with the irregular habits of the weavers. They indicated that the domestic weaver could throw up his labours for the hour or for the day, according to his whim. Not so the factory weaver. Hickson, in accepting this explanation, quotes the evidence of one Glasgow firm, "Messrs. Jeffry, of Glasgow, told me an instance of a country weaver, whose interest they were anxious to promote, because he was related to their agent. This weaver, whose earnings, at Westlington in Peeblesshire, had not exceeded 6s. per week, was offered employment in the factory and enabled to earn 11s.6d. He soon found that more leisure and less money suited him better than close application to the loom during factory hours (69 working hours in the week). He therefore returned to his native village".<sup>2</sup>

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1. "In the factory of Messrs. Johnston & Galbraith, the weavers are paid for a 15<sup>00</sup> 4/4 gingham, 32 inches wide, 2d per ell. For the same fabric, the domestic weavers will receive 2½d and 2<sup>3</sup>/8d, yet the net average amount earned by the former will be at least 9s per week, and by the latter 6s at the very utmost, both working the same length of time". Ibid. p.8. (Mr. Somerville, the manager of this factory assured Hickson that if a weaver earned habitually less than 8s.6d a week he would be discharged for not rendering his loom more productive) cp. Hickson's Rep. p.11.
  2. Ibid. p.9.

While this is obviously an authentic case it seems doubtful if extensive hours of work in the factories were the real reason for the weaver's reluctance to enter them. His hours seem to have been quite as long, or longer, working in the home.<sup>1</sup> Moreover in some of the factories at least the hours were by no means regular.<sup>2</sup> The real explanation of the difference between the wages of the factory worker and the out-worker seems to lie in the fact that whereas the working hours of the factory worker were all taken up with actual weaving, those of the out-worker were not. The domestic weaver took up time every week in attending the warehouse, collecting his yarn and taking back the cloth, and preparing the web for the shuttle. This last operation, which involved beaming the warps of the new web and drawing or passing them through the heddles or reed, often took up most of Monday. In this the weavers assisted one another. The beamed warp had then constantly to be kept moist by applying a special paste. All this and other details took up a considerable proportion of the domestic weaver's time,

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1. See Table B below p. 102.

2. See also Harding's description of the weavers in linen factories. "They are under very little restraint as to hours, and those who receive high wages often work very irregularly. The weekly average would not, in my opinion, be above 60 hours. On carefully examining the books of a canvas factory at Dundee, I found that a week during which the average earnings had been high, was almost invariably followed by one in which very little was earned; the difference frequently amounted to 50 per cent. Saturday afternoon, Monday, and often Tuesday, are considered holidays, or rather idle days, during which little, if any, work is done". Rep. 1839, p. 187.

whereas in the factory he found the web ready for him, beamed and dressed by machinery, with nothing to interrupt his speed at the shuttle. Frequently also the yarn used in factories was of a superior quality to that given out to the domestic worker, and so broke and halted operations less frequently. The cost to the manufacturer of this beaming and dressing of the web probably accounts for the lower rate of wages paid to the factory weaver against the out-worker, but the fact that the factory weaver was able to specialise in his own work enabled him to earn on a normal week's work a higher total than he could at home. In thus being able to devote his whole time to his own craft, and not spending time on tasks which could be done by inferior labour or by machinery seems to lie the explanation of the higher wages earned by the weaver in the hand-loom factory.<sup>1</sup>

In view of this unavoidable loss in earnings to the domestic weaver the advantage seems to have been all on the side of the factory. But clearly the domestic weaver did not himself think so.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that in no instance did

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1. There is also the probability that the average efficiency of the domestic worker was declining due to his poor condition generally (see Chap.IV), and due to the recruitment of totally unskilled labour (see Chap.II), while at the same time the factories were increasing their efficiency.
  2. "Everywhere I observed a visible reluctance to working in factories, excepting among the woollen weavers, where the the custom of working in shops is the general rule of the trade". Hickson's Report p.11.



a domestic weaver's wage come within 2s. of the factory weaver's wage on the same fabric, Hickson found that the majority of the domestic weavers preferred to make this sacrifice rather than leave their homes. He quotes the experience of a new factory in Edinburgh, the Tan-Field Factory.--"The proprietor, Mr. John Wyllie, had found previously to my visit, a considerable difficulty in obtaining a sufficient supply of hands. He assured me that the majority of their weavers might earn, on the premises, from 10s. to 12s. a week, and without extraordinary application, but that although they had posted bills about the streets, advertising for weavers, but few were willing to accept the terms, and of the 18 first engaged five had left of their own accord in less than a month. On this account, Mr. Wyllie was turning his attention to teaching the trade to the young, whose habits were unformed. Perhaps at Paisley or Glasgow the same difficulties would not have been found".<sup>1</sup> But the evidence seems to suggest the same reluctance to enter the factories there also. Only in the woollen districts<sup>2</sup> and the linen districts round Dundee, where coarse bagging and canvas sheeting were woven, was a high proportion of the weaving population to be found in factories. Out of the total number

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1. Hickson's Rep.p.11.

2. Mostly the Borders. Also Kilmarnock where carpets were woven.

a domestic weaver's wage come within 2s. of the factory weaver's wage on the same fabric, Hickson found that the majority of the domestic weavers preferred to make this sacrifice rather than leave their homes. He quotes the experience of a new factory in Edinburgh, the Tab-Field Factory.--"The proprietor, Mr. John Wyllie, had found previously to my visit, a considerable difficulty in obtaining a sufficient supply of hands. He assured me that the majority of their weavers might earn, on the premises, from 10s. to 12s. a week, and without extraordinary application, but that although they had posted bills about the streets, advertising for weavers, but few were willing to accept the terms, and of the 18 first engaged five had left of their own accord in less than a month. On this account, Mr. Wyllie was turning his attention to teaching the trade to the young, whose habits were unformed. Perhaps at Paisley or Glasgow the same difficulties would not have been found.<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh was mainly a harness-weaving centre, engaged on rich fabrics. The wage offered by the factory might have held out more inducement in a plain-weaving centre. It seems unlikely that the same difficulties in obtaining weavers to go into factories, at this date, would necessarily have been found among the plain-weavers of Glasgow. But out of the total number

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1. Hickson's Rep. p.11.

of looms in the country only about 10% were situated in hand-loom factories, and opportunities of factory labour therefore were small.<sup>1</sup> It seems to have been the case that in the cotton industry the weaver preferred the independence of his home to the regulation of the factory, even although it meant lower wages, as has been seen, and in all probability longer hours of work.

The hours of work of the weaver in the hand-loom factory are generally stated to be about 60 hrs. in the week.<sup>2</sup> I have drawn up a table of the hours worked by the domestic weaver in his home.<sup>3</sup> This is compiled from evidence given before the Committee of 1834, and includes both weavers' and manufacturers' statements. The figures are given as an average over the year. Weavers sometimes state themselves to work longer hours than this, as much as 16 or 17 hours for days together, but obviously could not keep up this rate over a long period.<sup>4</sup> Although this table should not be regarded as anything more than a guide it seems clear enough that the hours worked weekly by the domestic weaver were considerably longer than those worked by the factory weaver. Alongside the hours worked in each branch I have given the figures

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1. This figure is based on the assumption that all the looms engaged in the three branches of woollens, carpets, and canvas sail-cloths etc. were situated in factories.  
See Ch. 1. Table 1.
  2. See Rep. 1839, p. 187. A Glasgow firm quotes a 69 hr. working week. See above p. 97.
  3. See Table 8. below, p. 102.
  4. See for instance Rep. 1839, p. 188.



Table 8

Table showing hours of work of domestic weaver per day,  
(Saturday was usually taken as a half-day)

Fabric	Ging-hams & Fulli-cates	Plain mus-lins	Plain silks	Silk gauzes	Zebras & Harness	Coarse Linens	Light Linens
Hours of work per day (excluding meals)	1 13-14	2 13-14	3 13-14	4 12	5 12	6 14	7 14
Average wage rate per wk.	8	8	9	8	8	10	11
S/D	5/0 $\frac{3}{4}$	5/-	6/6	7/8	7/10	6/9	6/-

All figures are taken from the Minutes of Evidence, S.C.  
(Hand-Loom Weavers) 1834.

1. M.E. Q.2564.
2. Ibid. Q.9680.
3. Ibid. Q.2498; in this case a deduction for mealtimes has been made on the basis of that given by similar classes of weavers.
4. Ibid. Q.962. see footnote 9.
5. Ibid. Q.3694. see footnote 9.
6. Ibid. Q.3235.
7. Ibid. Q.3517.
8. See Table 2 above.
9. "The hours of the plain weavers are longer than those of the harness weavers for this reason, that the harness weavers require a drawboy, and that the drawboy cannot undergo the same fatigue, and that they are confined to 12 hrs. a day, while the plain go to the extent of 14 or 15 hrs." M.E. Q.3694.
10. Ibid. Q.3242.
11. Ibid. Q.3516.

quoted as average wage rates for this year (1834).

The Table indicates, what was to be expected, that the longest hours were worked on those fabrics which paid the lowest wages. But there is some reason to believe that employment was probably more regular among the weavers of the plain fabrics than among the fancy and silk-weavers, who were the first to feel any fall in demand or change in fashion. It is probable that dependence on exports was relatively greater in the higher-class work which would make the better-paid weaver more vulnerable to irregularity of demand.<sup>1</sup> And the demand for the high-priced fabrics which he produced was always a temperamental one, being frequently confined to certain portions of the year, at any time liable to sudden changes of fashion, and at all times dependent on the prosperity of the community.<sup>2</sup>

Thus although the weekly income of the skilled weaver is high, and his hours of work low, as compared with that of the plain weaver, it is possible that his average annual income may have been relatively more reduced by unemployment than that of the plain weaver. The comments of a silk weaver on this point illustrate the position. "The weaver would do pretty well if he could depend on full employment throughout the year, one year with another, and especially upon the best

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1: See Ch. 11 p. 47.

2: For discussion of fluctuations in demand for Paisley Shawls see Rep. 1839, p.33.

fabrics; but the trade has always been uncertain and precarious. Every five or six years there comes a period of stagnation, which often lasts for two years before the trade is brisk again. The last winter (1838) was one of the worst we have known. The weather was unusually severe; and the trade almost destroyed, owing to the panic which affected the American houses. The holders of silk could not sell at any price, and the manufacturers therefore completely stopped. I and my family were always able to get work, but thousands could not, and owing to the inclemency of the season, they suffered much. At the present moment there are still many looms idle, though the greater part are employed".<sup>1</sup>

The silk and harness trades, being probably the most concerned in the export trade would be most vulnerable to any contractions in overseas markets. Apart from the year 1839, mentioned above, there were three other periods of particular depression in the trade. These are years of cyclical depression in trade in general - 1819, 1826, and 1837. Rostow, quoting Burns and Mitchell, marks these as years of trade cycle "troughs", following upon periods of particularly strong expansion.<sup>2</sup> The evidence of the marked

depression of the hand-loom weaving industry in these years

1. Hickson's Report p.76.

2. W.W. Rostow. British Economy of the Nineteenth Century, p.33.



is to be found in the statements of witnesses, in the movement of wage-rates,<sup>1</sup> showing a fall, and in the numbers of looms employed.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the effects of the broader cyclical movements, the trade was subject to shorter seasonal fluctuations of its own. It was usual for trade to be slack during the first three months of the year, and to pick up towards the end of the year. It might depend therefore on when a man was asked whether he had plenty of work whether his answer would be Yes or No. In general the witnesses questioned by the Committee in June and July 1834 had no complaint to make of irregularity or shortage of work at that moment.<sup>3</sup> But on the other hand it is mentioned as an evil by both Symons and Harding in their reports of 1839. The evil must have increased during these five years. By 1841 it is pointed out by these Commissioners in their final summary as one of the most serious drawbacks to the trade.<sup>4</sup> "There is no constancy of employment in any branch of Scottish hand-loom

weaving; all are liable to periodical stagnation, and there

1. See tables of wages above, Tables 1, 3, 5. pp. 77, 80, 82.
2. The only precise figures are for the year 1819; 13,281 looms occupied, 5256 standing idle. See J. Cleland, Enumeration of the Inhabitants of Glasgow. There are no figures obtainable for 1825, and in 1837-41 many weavers out of work were kept going with webs from the various relief committees (see Ch. V. pp. 134-145). But presumably without the activities of these charitable committees many more looms would have been standing idle.
3. See for instance M.E. p. 212 Q. 2836. "Have you constant employment just now." "We have had a surplus of work for these 6 months." (Pullicates and gingham).
4. Report of the Commissioners 1841. pp. 18-21.

were few of which some portion of the weavers were not thrown wholly out of employment during the crisis of last summer (1838), in fact these frequent stagnations are a considerable part, though far from the whole of the greivance."<sup>1</sup> Irregularity of employment affected the whole trade, both skilled and plain weaving, and not even the prosperous woollen trade was exempt from the evil.."Even at Jedburgh, notwithstanding the extraordinary impulse recently experienced in the Scottish woollen trade, both manufacturers and weavers complained of the inconstancy of demand and employment."<sup>2</sup> And at Lasswade, where the wages stated are the highest found in the west, or South-West of Scotland, being 20s to 25s a week (gross), the weavers were frequently idle for a week waiting for webs.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Rep.1839, p.8. See also "In May this year 756 of the Paisley looms were idle; in two months subsequently they were all, or very nearly all, again employed; at the present time, August 1838, all the Paisley and nearly all the Glasgow looms are in full employment, and some employers have already raised wages 1/8 to 1/4 per ell on pullicates, and in Paisley the lower class of wages is raised by 20 per cent. In April there were 365 idle in Glasgow; perhaps in six weeks there may be from 500 to 600 weavers seeking webs in both places..In the check and striped gingham a very few weeks ago the demand slackened so much that a large hand-loom factory was compelled to work short time." Rep.1839, p.9.

2. Ibid. p.9.

3. Ibid. p.44.

Thus the wages of the hand-loom weaver which have been given in evidence in this chapter should not be regarded as static, but as subject to irregularity and fluctuation, not only from year to year but also from week to week. While the rapidity with which they fell in bad times, and the difficulty of raising them in good, will be dealt with later,<sup>1</sup> no discussion of rates of wages could be considered completely without drawing attention to this irregularity of the trade, which many of the weavers themselves regarded as a greater evil than the actual lowness of wages.

Thus from the foregoing, certain conclusions emerge on the state of wages in the Hand-Loom Weaving Industry. First, that during the period (1815-45) the tendency of wages was to fall, with periods of particular depression in 1819, 1826, and 1837. Secondly, that wage-rates varied in the industry, not according to the value of the fabric woven, but according to the strength and skill of the weaver. Thus the highest rates were reached in the woollen industry, which demanded a considerable degree of both skill and strength and engaged no female labour; and in the broad linens and cottons which required strength; and in the silks and muslins which required skill. The lowest wages were paid for plain

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1. Ch. V, p.200-201.



work which required neither skill nor strength, and by far the greater number of looms in the industry, including nearly all those worked by women and children, were engaged in this. And the hours worked were longest on these fabrics paying the lowest wages. Thirdly, in the hand-loom factories, regardless of the fabric woven, the rates of wages were at least 2s a week higher than the out-worker's wage on the same fabric.

It is also clear that there was considerable irregularity in the demand for the commodities which the hand-loom weaver produced, and that possibly this was most felt in the better classes of work which supported the higher-paid workers, but that fluctuation in demand, and therefore in wages, affected the whole of the trade. Finally, there does not seem to be much evidence to support the idea that the hand-loom weaver was peculiarly able to take pecuniary advantage of the labour of his wife and children to an extent which would bring his total earnings up to the rates of wages in other trades, or that he had sources of income readily available in addition to the wage he made at his loom.

CHAPTER IVTHE MATERIAL AND MORAL CONDITION OF THE WEAVERS

In the fifty years preceding 1815 there had been no more prosperous trade in Scotland than hand-loom weaving,<sup>1</sup> nor a trade that employed a more enlightened and knowledgeable body of men. In education and understanding, in zest for reading and argument, and in intelligence and skill in their own trade they had no equals. Indeed they were marked out by their contemporaries as men whose calling seemed to raise them altogether above the general level of the tradesmen of their day.<sup>2</sup>

In part this was due to the prosperity of the trade. While wages stood high, and work well paid, the weaver worked only four or five days a week.<sup>3</sup> This compared very favourably

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1. "...I have it on the most competent authority that from 1785-1815 hand-loom weaving was the best trade going, and that in no other were wages so high." Rep.1839, p.49. See also table of wages in other trades. Appendix Table#2.
  2. "But when the century was in her teens what a band they were of single-minded, energetic, knowledgeable men". David Gilmour, *Reminiscences of the Pen Folk*, 1876, p.9.
  3. "Then was the daisy portion of weaving - the bright and mid-day period of all who pitched a shuttle, and of the happy one whose luck it was to win a weaver's smile. Four days did the weaver work - for then four days was a week, as far as working went, - and such a week to a skilful weaver brought forty shillings..."  
William Thom of Inverurie. *Rhymes & Recollections of a Hand-Loom Weaver*. 1844, page. 3.

with most other trades and left the weaver with both leisure and income to satisfy his taste for reading and argument. His fellow-weavers, frequently his neighbours, were in the same fortunate position and so the habit was bred among the weavers of devoting a great deal of time to discussion, in the loom-shop when the loom was silent, or at the "close-mou". Chat and argument went on for hours on every conceivable subject, but more particularly on literature, morals, and politics.<sup>1</sup>

It would not be enough to say, however, that the whole refinement of mind which characterised the skilled weaver proceeded solely from the remarkable combination of leisure and prosperity which the trade enjoyed. The work itself also had its effect upon the man. In the first place there was the discipline of a solitary craft, where the weaver sat for many hours, alone, or with his draw-boy, but in either case both constrained to silence by the noise of the loom. In the second place there was the nature of the work. In the harness weaving, where generally speaking the cream of the weaving society lay, the very greatest concentration was required. Continuous attention and a careful touch, and all a man's powers of memory and precision were called for.

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1. See David Gilmour, *Faisley Weavers of Other Days*, 1876.  
Also Matthew Blair, *The Paisley Shawl*, 1904.



The successful manufacture of the imitation Cashmere shawl at Paisley is an outstanding example of this. The Paisley weavers were already notably skilled in figured goods, such as light muslins and lawns and silks, when the popularity of the Indian Cashmere shawl after the war induced them to try their hands at copying it. They succeeded so well that the shawl trade became the foremost part of the harness trade at Paisley. Not only that, but it transformed many weavers from craftsmen to artists, or to a combination of both. They were greatly influenced by the beauty of the patterns on which they worked. "Out of the travail of this drudgery, was born the patient industry, the intellectual strength, the cultured taste, and that love of beauty in factories, in nature, and in song, which marked the weavers of Paisley".<sup>1</sup> It was not beyond the skill of some weavers actually to create the patterns on which they worked themselves.

It was very hard work, and often heavy work, but it was a rewarding and satisfying kind of labour which gave the weaver a sense of one-ness with his work, and he wished for no other. "Handicraft is an education. The hand-worker has scope to exercise taste, invention, harmony, art and genius, in a way that the worker who simply tends a machine

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1. Matthew Blair. The Paisley Shawl 1904, p. 40.

can never have".<sup>1</sup>

It is not too much to say that the highly skilled weaver was an artist who appreciated the skill of his work and accepted prestige and prosperity as his due. How much the more bitter therefore was his fall; a fall so low that within twenty years of the termination of the war it had placed him on a level with the poorest unskilled labourer, and left him scarcely a vestige of the substance and the leisure which had formerly so distinguished him.

The effect of this catastrophic decline in the weavers' fortunes was to divide the weaving classes into two distinct classes, almost entirely demarcated by age. The elder men still retained to a remarkable degree the distinctive qualities of the weaver, and faced their misfortunes with all their intelligence and good sense. Charles Baird who saw a great deal of the weavers in distress in the years 1837-42 says warmly of them, "From personal experience, as well as from the information of others intimately acquainted with the subject, the writer is able to state that the religious, moral, and intellectual condition of the workers was long of a very high grade, and even yet the writer is of opinion that the elder portion of them rank higher in these respects than

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1. Ibid. p.46.

any other class of tradesmen".<sup>1</sup>

But the younger generation was, as might be expected, an altogether inferior body of men. The younger weavers had never known the good times at first hand, or only in their childhood, and all their working years were associated with the declining fortunes of the trade. Many worked desperately hard, but it made no significant difference; however great their exertions they were unable to extricate themselves from the poverty of their trade, and the knowledge of this had an inevitably lowering effect.<sup>2</sup>

It is natural to ask why, in view of all this, the weaver did not quit his unprofitable trade? The answer is not straightforward. Many obstacles faced the weaver trying to change his trade. These will be dealt with more fully later,<sup>3</sup> but it can be said that their combined effect was to keep the weaver where he was. Few escaped. Indeed between 1815 and 1845 the number of weavers increased.<sup>4</sup> At the same time wages steadily declined. The result was that between

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1. Charles Baird. Observations upon the Poorest Class of Operatives in Glasgow Vol. 1, 1839, p.171. Baird was Secretary to the Glasgow Relief Committee from 1837-41. For some account of his work see Ch. V, pp.138-141
  2. "They have become so cast down on account of the reduction of the remuneration of their labour, that they have lost their situation in society, and as soon as that is arrived at, it has an effect upon their morals". Rep. C.M.S. 1833, M.E. Q.11285.
  3. See below Ch. V.
  4. See above Ch. 1. p. 6.



these years the weaver's whole way of life was transformed.

In the first place he experienced a tremendous fall in his standard of living. Up to the peace of 1815 he had normally lived very well. Thereafter little by little he had to tighten his belt until by the thirties he was often struggling to ward off actual starvation.<sup>1</sup> Meat had almost disappeared from his diet.<sup>2</sup> Most weavers before the Commission of 1834 state simply that they never saw meat; they had potatoes and milk mostly. One witness was asked to recall what he used to eat. "I remember in former times, that the weaver could sit down to a tea-breakfast, and have his butter and ham like any ordinary furnished table; but the general breakfast now is porridge and buttermilk, and the dinner potatoes and possibly a herring, or any cheap article; as for broth or fresh meat, it is a very rare thing that it is in a weavers home".<sup>3</sup>

A comparison of weavers' wages with the price of provisions during this period, 1815-45, makes clear that only the cheapest food could be bought, and even that frequently

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1. "You know that weavers frequently suffer from want of food when they are in full employment." "Yes I am certain of it; more particularly those that have two or three children under age". Rep.1834. M.E. Q.829. See also Rep. 1839. p.189.

2. Rep. 1834 M.E. Q.3030. Rep.1839. p.18.

3. Rep. 1834 M.E. Q.770.

in insufficient quantities. Prices of provisions had been falling since 1815, but not nearly so steeply as weavers' wages.

The Table given below has been drawn up to show the movements of Real and Money Wages of Cotton hand-loom weavers in the years 1821-38.

1 Year	2 Index of Wages of Cotton Weavers 1	3 Index of Wholesale Prices 2	4 Index of Real Wages <u>col2</u> <u>col3</u> x100
1821	100	100	100
1825	93	110	85
1830	62	86	72
1835	68	85	80
1838	55	89	62

1. This index is calculated by taking a simple average of the high and low rates of earnings on fine classes of work as shown in Table 5, Ch.111 above.
2. Jerons' Index, as given in Layton & Crowther, "An Introduction to the Study of Prices", 3rd Edition, p.237.

The general benefit felt in the country from the reduction of food prices was hardly noticed by the weavers because of the tremendous reduction of their own wages which put most articles practically out of their power to purchase. Three budgets out of those submitted to the Committee in 1834 may be offered as a sample of the situation prevailing at that time:

<u>Glasgow</u> <sup>1</sup>		<u>Dundee</u> <sup>2</sup>		<u>Perth</u> <sup>3</sup>	
	s - d		s - d		s - d
1½ pecks oatmeal	1- 4½	3 pecks oat-		2½ pecks oat	
1½ " potatoes	7½	meal @ 1/1	3- 3	meal	2- 8
3 pts buttermilk	3	Milk	1- 2	3½ lbs barley	
2 lbs herrings	3	2 oz tea at		(½ lb a day)	7
1 lb salt	½	4½d	9	3½ lbs beef	
½ lb soap	3½			(½ lb a day)	1- 9
½ lb cheese	4	1¼ lb sugar @ 6d	9	vegetables	3½
½ lb sugar	3½	½ lb soap	3	potatoes	
½ oz tea	2½	1 loaf wheaten		(½ peck	
1 qrt train oil	9	bread	7	daily)	2- 0½
Starch, dressing	6	Potatoes	7½	milk	1- 2
etc		3 lbs beef @ 5d	3	House rent	9
Rent of loom &		Light for week			
setting up	6	(average through-			
Fuel	6	out year)	1½		
House Rent	1- 0	Salt	1		
Church seat	1½	House rent	1- 2		
		Coals per wk.	9		
	7- 0½		10- 9		9- 3

1. "Minimum subsistence of a Glasgow weaver, without Malt Liquor, Animal Food, Clothing, Church Seat (sic), School, Friendly Society etc. Rep. 1834, M.E. Q.1912.
2. "Weekly maintenance of a Weaver's Family consisting of a man, wife, and three children." Ibid. Q.3249.
3. "I drew up a scale of living for a husband, a wife, and two children". Ibid. Q.3016.  
 "This would be a bare supply to him but he does not get all this". Asked what the weaver did then witness replied, "Those who cannot obtain that must just exactly lose clothes, and get in arrear with house rent, and with the groceries which they deal, and so they morally and physically get down probably for years, until probably some of the family arise and give them a help". Ibid. Q.3031.

The weaver will see that the Glasgow budget contains no allowance for meat at all. At the same time the weekly sum required for this budget is higher, according to the findings of the last chapter, than the average weekly wage of a great



many of the weavers.<sup>1</sup> It may be assumed therefore that a great many families did not achieve even the meagre comforts of their budget quoted here. The Perth budget has provision for meat but makes no allowance for tea or sugar, or for fuel, light and dressing for the loom. It seems likely that the food allowance would have to be cut to meet these necessities.<sup>2</sup> The Dundee budget is more comprehensive and reflects the generally higher wage scales at Dundee. None of the budgets makes any allowance for education or clothing, for rates or replacements, or for the maintenance and depreciation of the loom. Only the Glasgow budget allows anything for a church seat, and from the replies of witnesses in general on this subject it was unusual to do so.<sup>3</sup>

The point to be taken from these budgets needs no labouring. The weavers, so frequently called all too truly, "the poor weavers", were in many cases near to starving and in every case fearfully reduced, either by the standards of their own former state, or the state of skilled and semi-skilled tradesmen of their own time.<sup>4</sup>

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1. See above Ch.111, Table 3, and Tables 4 & 5.

2. See footnote 3<sup>above</sup>. Witness expected a weekly deficiency of 1s-2s a week "at least" on this budget, see wages at Perth Ch.111, Table 2 footnote 4.

3. See below p. 134.

4. "Do you think it possible that a man with 6s 6d a week can keep his family from starving?" "I have known a family before now want meat for 24 hours; there is no proof that they have absolutely fallen down with hunger, but they are extremely ill-looking compared with the rest of the trades in general." Rep. 1834, M.E. Q.826.

It might be expected that the weavers would be heavily in debt to tradesmen, and in the early years of their changed fortunes this must certainly have been the case, but as they grew progressively poorer and poorer less and less credit was allowed them until in 1834 we read, "Credit has vanished almost to the weaving body of Glasgow."<sup>1</sup>

In the matter of house rents the weavers' arrears were more serious. In the more prosperous days at the beginning of the century it had become quite common for a weaver to build his own house. But by the time of the Enquiry in 1834 it seemed that few weavers remained who could call, or even hope to call, their homes their own.<sup>2</sup> Nearly all were rented.<sup>3</sup>

1. "Are they in debt to their tradesmen often, from the same poverty?" "I believe there will be a great deal of money owing to the grocers by the weavers; but I believe that poverty has also caused a great lessening of credit amongst that body." M.E. 1834, Q. 858 (Paisley). See also Ibid. Q. 1916.
2. "Do you recollect, in former times, weavers, out of those savings, were in the habit of building houses for themselves?" "Yes, it was very common in Paisley before my day; there are a great number of the houses standing yet, where weavers have built a shop and as much of a house as would serve their own family... In my day, it became quite common for weavers, by their savings, to borrow perhaps, if they had £100 of their own, to borrow £200 or £300 more, and build a house, a house that would serve themselves; and they could let perhaps as much as would pay the interest of the borrowed money. This was done to a great extent in Paisley, but the alteration of the currency in 1879 has in many cases given the lender the whole of the money." Ibid. Q. 1145.
3. In 1876 David Gilmour writes of Paisley that, "At this day not one of whole streets of houses built from the savings of weavers remain in the possession of the original families or their descendants." Paisley Weavers of Other Days, David Gilmour 1876.
3. A Scots weaver usually rented the whole house for himself and his family. The Irish weavers on the same low wages frequently shared a property with another family, which lessened the burden of the rent. Rep. 1834. M.E. Q. 3281.

Rents in Scotland were usually paid half-yearly at this time and leases taken from year to year.<sup>1</sup> But it was becoming increasingly common, where the tenant was a weaver, for the landlord to require security before letting a house to him, or else asking a month's rent in advance, thereafter collecting it monthly. It might even be collected fortnightly or weekly in an attempt to forestall the desperate arrears into which the weavers were wont to fall.<sup>2</sup> There were instances of weavers being a year or a year and a half in arrears, and being ejected on account of it.<sup>3</sup> Frequently goods were taken on account by the landlord if the weavers themselves did not make the first move to pawn or sell them.<sup>4</sup> There were without doubt many exceptions.<sup>5</sup> But it was generally

1. Rents paid at this time by the weavers were around 1/- to 1/2d a week. In the countryside they were rather lower (C.p. Perth; 9d). Rents had fallen since 1815 in some parts of the country, but not in or near the large towns where the demand for dwelling houses kept the rents of the weavers' shops up.
2. "...in Paisley, since about 15 or 20 years ago, if a handloom weaver had not his rent paid at the term of payment, he was extremely anxious that that should not be known to the public. Now the people are not ashamed to acknowledge that their rents are not paid, and in most instances rents are levied quarterly, and as their poverty increases, it is by the week." Rep. 1834, M.E. Q. 857.
3. Ibid. Q. 765.
4. "Have they sometimes been obliged to pawn or sell their furniture and their bed-clothes to pay their rent, and to keep themselves going?" "Yes, often, and they are often taken by the landlord for the rent." Ibid. Q. 3264.
5. "I know of some individuals who are in the practice of putting 1s or 1s.6d into the bank weekly, for the purpose of meeting their rents, but they are not able to do that every week; but some of the most industrious do it, though I was never in the practice of doing it myself." Ibid. Q. 3262



accepted by the witnesses in 1834 that the weavers as a body were usually behind with the rent.

On the question of rates, police rates, water rates and so on, it seems impossible that the cotton weavers could actually have paid their rates regularly, except perhaps those <sup>weavers</sup> in the harness branch.<sup>1</sup> A Glasgow witness says that to his certain knowledge "there is a much greater proportion of weavers that actually do not pay the rates than of any other tradesmen."<sup>2</sup> But all were charged.<sup>3</sup> This witness adds that in his district the rates were very rigorously exacted, and the weavers were frequently pounded for them and had articles of furniture taken away. "I believe it will just show the miserable condition of the weavers as much as anything for me to state that I know a street just now in the Calton of Glasgow, where as soon as a collector of police-dues, water-rent or road-money is seen, an alarm is instantly given, and

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1. After giving his wage a Paisley weaver states, "and upon each rent of £5 we have to pay 5s police-money, and in fact for getting leave to walk upon our streets we have to pay 3s which they call road-money; and we have to pay 3s to the support of an hospital for we have no poor-rates in Scotland; and all this is to be taken out of those earnings and at the same time it must be considered that when those institutions were set up the operative weaver had as much for his labour in one day as he has now for the whole week together." Rep. C.M.S. 1833. Q.11987.

2. Rep. 1834, M.E. Q.801.

3. With occasional exceptions. "Are weavers obliged to pay the same assessments and public burdens of all kinds as they used to do?" - "Equally the same; but there was one season, I think it was last year or the year before, that the weavers of Calton, a suburb of Glasgow, in which there are 20,000 people, and about 2,000 weavers; the magistrates and police commissioners were kind enough to make the assessment as low as possible, lower to them than to any other of the inhabitants." Ibid. Q.769.

every door belonging to a weaver in the street is bolted, lest they should get admittance and take away any little thing they have for arrears."<sup>1</sup>

There cannot have been much to take. There had been no money for a long time to replace things which wore out, and the better articles of furniture were frequently pawned or sold.<sup>2</sup> Bedding and blankets were scarce and in many houses nothing remained but the barest minimum.<sup>3</sup>

Clothing was equally scanty and it was becoming no uncommon thing in the thirties to see a weaver in rags.<sup>4</sup> The weavers had in the past been noted for the substantial way in which they dressed themselves and their families. But twenty years of falling wages had made great changes and on every side observers declared that the weavers were

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1. Rep.1834, Q.769.
  2. "Have they worse furniture?" (than formerly). "Their furniture is in a great measure run out, and they are certainly not able to purchase new furniture at the present time. And their houses, taking them in general, are extremely poorly furnished." Ibid. Q.668.  
 .."In a great many cases in respect to houses, they have got no furniture in them." Ibid. Q.1286.
  3. "The bed-clothes are very light indeed; they have very few of them, and during the winter months of the year they feel a great deal of privation on that score, for their beds are very lightly covered; I know that for a fact". Ibid. Q.3263. Also Q.806. "The weavers are as badly off here as anywhere else; many in the Calton have no bedding to sleep on." Rep.1839, p.22.
  4. "The working suit, provided it covers the skin, is not minded, so that you would see a weaver in rags occasionally?" "Very frequently; it is quite common, and being common in his neighbourhood, he is not ashamed of it among his own class." Rep.1834. Q.776. "I have known the situation of a weaver such that he was obliged to borrow his neighbour's shoes before he could go to the warehouse." Ibid. Q.774.

extremely ill-clad, and the situation getting worse yearly.<sup>1</sup>  
 The cost of clothes made it impossible for weavers to buy them.<sup>2</sup> As their clothes from better days wore out there was no way of replacing them.<sup>3</sup>

To make matters worse the weavers had taken to pawning.<sup>4</sup>  
 Such clothes or bedding as they had that were decent were gradually finding their way into the pawnbroker's shop.  
 According to Cleland Pawn-broking had not existed in Scotland before 1813.<sup>5</sup> It expanded and flourished in the distress

1. "I have observed, in twenty-five years, a wonderful difference in the clothes of the working classes, and in the numbers that attend funerals. Formerly large bodies of weavers, in cases of funerals, would leave their work, and dress themselves like gentlemen, in black, and attend the funerals of their deceased acquaintances; but not one for four now attend that used to attend. I have put the question - Why is this? The answer has been that their clothes were worn out, or if they have decent clothes, that they are in pawn and they cannot relieve them." Report on Poor Laws 1843. Appendix 1. Q.10343.
2. The price of clothes had fallen since 1815. Witness Buick was wearing a coat which cost him 50 shs. (he does not say when he bought it, but it is some time ago). In 1809 he would have paid £3 for it. But he was much better able to pay £3 then than he is to pay £2.10/- now. (see wages Ch. 111). Similarly shoes had fallen since the war about 1s.6d a pair. But what weaver could afford 7s to 8s for a pair of shoes?
3. Some weavers bought secondhand but said the clothes were "fairly worn out" before they got them. M.E.1834. Q.3259.
4. "Is it the custom of the poor people to pawn their clothes at the beginning of the week and to take them out at the end?" "I have no doubt of it." "Do you know whether hand-loom weavers resort to these pawnbroker's shops more than the other inhabitants of Paisley?" "I dare say there are some of the Irish people; but I infer that there must be a proportion of the hand-loom weavers also, because that trade forms the greatest part of our Society." Rep. C.M.S. 1833, M.E. Q.q.12001 and 12002.
5. J. Cleland, Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the City of Glasgow 1820. Postscript.  
 "Within these 12 or 15 years we had no pawn-broking shops in our town, (Paisley), and now, we have three or four." Rep. C.M.S. 1833.



after the war. In 1820 a charitable Committee in Glasgow set out to redeem the pledges of 2043 heads of families. It found that, contrary to expectation, the pledges were nearly all Scots, with very few Irish, and that of the 2043 only a very few were actual paupers or in receipt of relief, and that by far the majority were drawn from the ranks of the "industrious poor". Of the 7380 articles redeemed, (pledged for the total sum of £739.15. 6.), 6762 were personal clothes or bed clothes.<sup>1</sup>

As the distress increased the number of pledges increased until it came to the point when there was nothing left to pawn. "They have been left perfectly bare. Their clothes are pawned, and anything they can make goes to redeem the things they have pawned. If they are not redeemed before the winter, they will be as they were last winter, (1842), in the most distressing state."<sup>2</sup> It may fairly be taken as evidence of the weavers' distressed state in Paisley at least, (for it may be assumed that in this town most of the pledgers were weavers), that after 1837 the number of pledgers decreased till the pawnbrokers were complaining that such business as they did have was of the most meagre sort, such as a shirt

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1. J. Cleland Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the City of Glasgow 1820. Postscript.
  2. Report on Poor Laws 1843 Appendix 1. Evidence on Paisley. Q.10,343.

or a handkerchief which in ordinary times would never have been pawned.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of wholesome food, warm clothing, and any sort of comfort in their houses, had an inevitably wretched effect upon the health of the weavers.<sup>2</sup> One doctor giving evidence to Symons in 1839 says outright that, "they (the weavers) are more liable to typhus fever and other epidemics than the class of field labourers or mechanics, from exposure to cold, undue exertion, want of solid nourishing food, and spare clothing. The privations suffered at home engender diseases of the lungs and stomach, complaints which the nature of their employment and sedentary habits aggravate. Neither farm-servants nor other out-door labourers are nearly so liable to the influence of these diseases."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the privations they suffered, the long hours of their work pulled down the weavers' health. The pallor of their faces was an accepted feature of their work.<sup>4</sup> But apparently their growth also was affected. One witness went so far as to say that in his recollection the Paisley

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1. 1837-42 pledges sank from 3,966 to 1792. Ibid. Q.732. Very few articles were being redeemed in 1841-2. Previously only about four in a hundred were not redeemed. Ibid.Q.1252.
  2. Rep.1834. M.E. Q.2313.
  3. Rep.1839 p.20.
  4. "...a large proportion of the weaving population is easily distinguished by even a casual observer, from other classes of labourers, by a pale complexion, a somewhat worn appearance, and a stooping, and by no means a robust or active carriage." Rep.1839, p.188.

men were a "larger race altogether."<sup>1</sup>

In Glasgow the weavers, in common with all the very poor of that city, suffered the most terrible ill-health that prevailed there. Symons, who had travelled widely, said finally after his investigations at Glasgow, that disease culminated there "to a pitch unparalleled in Great Britain."<sup>2</sup> Certainly the mean annual mortality rate was higher in Glasgow than anywhere else in Great Britain. But equally grim is the statement of Captain Miller, a Chief of Police there in this period, that for everyone who died annually, two were constantly sick.<sup>3</sup>

There can seem no doubt now that the prevailing destitution was the foremost cause of disease. But at the time the relationship was less clear and Dr. Alison's was a lone voice urging the theory that fever epidemics were largely the result of much previous want and misery, and were not to be found in thriving prosperous communities where the working classes were able to maintain themselves in comfort

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1. M.E. 1834 Q.3695.

2. Rep.1839 p.52. It was believed to be at 1 in 24, higher than the mortality rate of any other European City. Cleland, the Glasgow Statistician, took great exception to Symons' remarks on the wynds of Glasgow (where very few weavers lived) on the grounds that they were not representative of the city as a whole. He also objected to attention being drawn to the high death rate there on the grounds that many of the deaths were due to fevers! James Cleland. *Description of the City of Glasgow* pp. 34-35.

3. Captain Miller, Papers on Crime 1841.



and decency.<sup>1</sup> Statistics show Glasgow to have been the worst plague-spot in Britain, not excluding London.<sup>2</sup> Typhus was probably the most deadly of all the fevers : most frequently its victims were young men and women in the prime of life, most probably parents of young families. It is not to be imagined that the weavers could have escaped this scourge, and indeed though no statistics can be called to prove it, all the evidence points to their having been among its most likely victims.

It is much to be feared that death by fever from inanition, or constant ill-health throughout their lives, must have been the lot of a great many of the weavers of Glasgow, who indeed were 1/8th of the whole weaving population.<sup>3</sup>

In connection with the ill-health of the weavers the question of their addiction to spirit-drinking arises. This was a subject very much before the minds of the Commission of 1834, and the witnesses were asked to give their views on whether they thought the habit was increasing among the weavers, and whether they were more intemperate than other classes. Some witnesses thought not, but they were not

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1. Dr. Alison. The Management of the Poor in Scotland. p.10.

2. J. Stark. Vital Statistics of Scotland. Scottish Journal Vol.XLV, pp.74-80.

3. See Ch. 1 p. 12,

those who were most closely in touch with the weaving body; they were manufacturers or outsiders.<sup>1</sup> Those witnesses who were weavers themselves all confirmed the impression that spirit-drinking was increasing.<sup>2</sup> This was particularly emphasised by the Paisley witnesses.<sup>3</sup> They regretted it but clearly thought that no purpose would be served by minimising the situation. They thought that the increase of intemperance among the weavers was the result of anxiety and exhaustion brought on by their poverty, and the fact that due to their weakened condition a small quantity of spirits would inebriate them.<sup>4</sup> Thus rather than do the weavers' cause harm the witness felt that a true knowledge of the situation should command sympathy on their behalf.

It is not surprising in view of the ill-nourished, ill-clad, generally weakened state of the weavers, and their consequent ill-health, that they should no longer enjoy the reputation in society for intelligence, dignity, and sobriety, which they had formerly held. It was very generally agreed that the older members of the weaver class had changed very little, not nearly as much as their changed circumstances might suggest. In spite of steadily increasing poverty they

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1. Rep.1834. M.E. Q.3695.

2. Ibid. Q.2699.

3. Ibid. Qq.3696, 1206, 858.

4. Ibid. Qq.1208, 2544.

had retained their vigorous outlook and interests as far as their reduced circumstances permitted. But their numbers were yearly growing smaller and their place was being taken by a generation whose upbringing was altogether harder and barer, and who knew nothing at first-hand of the influences which had moulded their parents' lives. The witnesses' descriptions of the younger generation which they gave to the Royal Commission in 1834 form a sad commentary on the fortunes of the weaving trade in the twenty years since the peace.<sup>1</sup> The most severe critics of the rising generation were, perhaps understandably, the weavers themselves. Outsiders might perhaps not be so fully aware of what had been lost. But at the same time the weaver witnesses were not, with one exception,<sup>2</sup> censorious. They explained that such was the weaver's poverty that, struggle how he might, he could hardly keep his head above water, and his children, witnesses of his confusion, grew easily out of hand.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid. Qs. 2314, 2481, 859, 2482, 2697 etc. Rep. 1839, p. 52  
 .. "the younger generation in other trades very greatly excel the contemporary class of the weaving population"  
 There is the odd dissentient voice. Charles Baird for instance, who as Secretary to the Glasgow Relief Committee during 1837-41 had every opportunity of judging, thinks the weavers in general "civil and industrious and in point of moral and mental worth at least equal to the same classes in any other city or town I have visited." Observations upon the Poorest Class of Operatives in Glasgow 1839 p. 5.
  2. See evidence of Thomas Paul, M.E. 1834, Q. 2314. This weaver held very rigid views, not shared by the others. See his evidence on Sunday Schools below p. 131. *from 1.*
  3. "Does the poverty of the father diminish his control over the conduct of his sons and daughters?" "Yes, I am of opinion that it does weaken his authority to a great extent." Rep. 1834, M.E. Q. 860.



When they in turn came to marry, often early and perhaps imprudently (though it is hard to see how prudence could have helped <sup>1</sup>) they had not the background nor the training that the previous generation had had to sustain them in their troubles. In particular they lacked two of the formative influences of previous generations - Education and Religion.

Many hand-loom weavers still made vigorous efforts to send their children to a day school, but it was a habit not nearly so widespread among the weavers as it used to be.<sup>2</sup> The cost of schooling in the country was generally from 2s to 2s.6d a quarter.<sup>3</sup> In Glasgow it was rather dearer, being about 4s a quarter.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that to raise these moneys was almost certainly beyond the power of the plain cotton weaver, or even of the harness weaver who had only a single wage coming into the home. In the budgets described earlier,

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1. It was generally thought that marriages were getting earlier - "if we are to wait until we have something laid up we must wait for ever." *M.P. Q. 353*; ~~1834~~ *Ibid.* The ministers questioned under the Poor Law Enquiry of 1844 give no decisive answer on this point. See Appendix to Report on Poor Laws 1844, Part VI.
  2. Rep. C.M.S. 1833. M.E. Q.11277. Also Rep.1834. M.E. Q.780. Rep.1839, pp.48 and 49.
  3. John Adam, plain linen weaver from Forfar stated that in his district schooling was very cheap; 12s to 14s a year, yet he could not afford it. Rep.1834. M.E. Q.3534.

where the sums required ranged from 7s.0 $\frac{1}{2}$ d to 10s.9d, nothing was set aside for education. Some families continued to have one child at ~~the~~ school for a short time until he was of age to begin work. Formerly it had been the weaver's custom to send each child when he was five or six and keep him there until he was about nine. "Now they have to wait till they are about six or seven years of age, and they go to school one at a time in a family, and remain a short time till they can read the New Testament; and then commence working."<sup>1</sup> Not later than the age of ten their education, such as it had been, terminated. A few children were sent to evening schools for an hour or two; but after their day's work it is not likely that they profited very much by this. A great many children got no education at all.

The Glasgow weavers were particularly pessimistic about the state of education among the children there. It was clearly not general among Glasgow cotton weavers to attempt to send their children to a day school at all.<sup>2</sup> The best that most weavers could hope to do was to send the children to a Sunday-school where they were educated free. There, they

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1. Ibid. Q.855.

2. "Have you yourself been obliged to take your children from school?" "I have never been able to send them to school, because as soon as they are able to do anything in working they are put to it; and these are the general features among the weavers at Glasgow." Ibid. Q.2317.

were taught reading, and sometimes writing, as well as receiving moral and religious instruction, and most weavers thought the Sunday schools a valuable institution.<sup>1</sup> But the progress was necessarily terribly slow. Probably the Sunday-schools were better than nothing, but as a means of Education, properly so-called, they were wholly inadequate.

It was a great sorrow to the weavers not to be able to educate their children. This emerges clearly from all the evidence which they gave in 1834 and again in 1839. They would have educated their children if they could; they valued education greatly, but their poverty prevented them.<sup>2</sup> In the woollen districts and some of the linen districts where wages were higher, the weavers' children were much better educated.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Not Thomas Paul, who adds to his general criticisms of Sunday Schools that it was "nothing uncommon" when those Sabbath schools are dismissing to hear a noise in the streets of children cheering as if it was any other day! Ibid. Q.2319.
  2. "Whilst I distinctly assert that the great body of the children of the cotton-weavers are growing up in a state of semo-barbarism, I must also state, that I believe that there is no one feeling more deeply or more strongly implanted in the breasts of the parents than a desire to educate them. ...They make generally speaking, great exertions to effect it; and I know an instance where clothes have been parted with to keep a child at school." Rep.1839, p.48.
  3. Ibid. p.48. See Dr. Harding's Report for the E. of Scotland 1839. He gives a much more favourable account of the state of education in his district, where a greater proportion of the weavers was engaged in better-paid work. Ibid. p.191.



The Book Societies, formerly almost entirely supported by weavers, were almost extinct. Books themselves were fast disappearing from the homes of the weavers, where, of all working men, they were most likely to be found.<sup>1</sup> Newspapers and magazines, books of information and travel, science and philosophy, had disappeared from the shelves, and even the family Bible had in some case found its way to the pawn-brokers.<sup>2</sup>

"Intelligence and knowledge will consequently cease with the present generation." This pronouncement of a Glasgow weaver in 1839 has a specially sad ring in that intelligence and knowledge had been the very qualities which had so distinguished the weavers as a body. But to the reader of 100 years later studying the evidence they gave to the Commissions of Enquiry, it seems hard to believe that the intelligence of the weavers was in question. The witnesses seem so extraordinary alert and intelligent, so clear and forthright,

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1. "Books, then a rarer commodity than now, were scattered over every available spot in the large kitchen, and in great demand after the day's labour. Milton, Burns, Shakespeare, and volumes of the Spectator might be found mixed in admirable confusion with Brown's Commentary and Concordance, Bunyan, Bibles and The Questions." David Gilmour, Paisley Weavers of Other Days 1876, p.21. "Many of the weavers of those days had libraries equal to those of ministers or professional men". Matthew Blair. The Paisley Shawl, 1904, p.46.
  2. Of the articles pledged at the pawnbrokers (quoted above p.123) only 618 out of 7380 were not articles of clothing. 102 of these 618 articles were Bibles.

that any present day Commission would be glad to meet them. However, one must accept what they say of themselves, and what observers confirm, and assume that in selecting their representatives to go forward for examination they had chosen extraordinarily well. These witnesses were not all men of the older generation. Some had young families. But the two who stand out in the exhaustive Enquiry of 1834 were Hugh Mackenzie, a plain cotton-weaver, and James Orr, a silk-weaver; they were both men who had known personally the earlier prosperity, and whose families were grown up; and they showed the greatest possible concern about the state, physical and moral, into which the younger generation of weavers was rapidly falling.

Church-attendance was another side of the weaver's life which had gone the same way as education. A steady decline was everywhere remarked. Various reasons were put forward for this, the most usual being the lack of suitable clothes.<sup>1</sup>

Though this in itself may not seem an insuperable obstacle to

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1. "Even since their condition has deteriorated they have in a great measure lost heart, and because they have not the same outward look as other tradesmen they generally stay at home and take skulking walks in the country to get out of sight." Rep.1834 M.E. Q.609.

This evidence is repeated almost word for word by another witness. in Ibid. Q.3550.

attending church it was no doubt real enough to those who wore the clothes. Some said they were too fatigued after the week's work to go to church on Sunday.<sup>1</sup> Others pointed to their inability to pay seat-rents.<sup>2</sup> One minister from a Glasgow church gave his opinion that it was very probable that, "a poor person taking a seat in one of the churches in Glasgow might be removed therefrom, but that the same exclusion would hardly be visited on a well-dressed person."<sup>3</sup> He added that there were no free sittings for the poor in Glasgow in general; in the Barony Kirk there were 50.<sup>4</sup> The words have not an encouraging sound. On the other hand it is very likely that this rent would have been waived willingly had the weavers asked, but pride and the dislike of being thought paupers prevented them from finding out. The fact was that the weavers had lost heart. They looked back to their prosperity and their church-going days together. The church had had its place in their lives in their prosperity, but in their adversity they did not turn to it. Even among the elder class of weavers, who were best suited to meet the difficulties of suitable clothes and seat-rent, church-attendance had fallen off markedly. They were not necessarily more deficient in this respect than other tradesmen. Opinions

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1. Rep. C.M.S. M.E. Q.11289.

2. Rep. 1834, M.E. Q.2316, and Qq.1132-1144. Also see Rep.1839, p.47.

3. Rep.1839. p.47.

4. Ibid. loc. cit.



differed on this point. Some witnesses thought they were; others thought there was nothing to choose between them. But in either case the significant fact to the weavers was still that whereas in the past - many of them had been in the habit of attending church and regarding themselves as members of a church, that habit had been lost, not from principle but from poverty.

Poverty attacked from every side and its effect went far beyond the immediate necessities of life. Without assuming, or wishing to assume, that material prosperity, or health, or leisure, or education, or church-membership, had necessarily engendered in the weavers' lives virtue or happiness, yet it is hard to think how in the absence of them all virtue or happiness could be sustained. The tale of the weavers' declining fortunes, sad as any such tale must be, was a particularly hard one in that it all took place within the lifetime of a single generation. The men who had seen the good times saw also the bad, and saw with them the whole fullness of their lives taken from them. Their comfort at home, their enjoyment abroad, their pleasure in things of the mind and of the spirit, their pride in their trade, and their hope for their children, were all cut from under them in the short space of twenty years.

CHAPTER VSTATE - HELP

During this period of very great hardship, when the hours of labour were inordinately long, and the wages of labour intolerably small, the weaver might turn for help in two directions : he might look to the benevolence of the Society in which he lived; or he might by his own exertions, or by concerted action with his fellows, try to better his conditions himself. For the sake of clarity the two may perhaps be regarded separately as State-help, and Self-help.

For the first, State-help at this time was limited to action in two fields : there was the state system of Poor Relief, and there were schemes for state-assisted emigration.<sup>1</sup> But to the weaver in Scotland the limits of this assistance were narrowed because before 1845 there was no state-system of Poor-Relief in Scotland such as obtained in England.

The tradition in Scotland had been that each parish either supported its poor out of collections and special

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1. This help sounds meagre indeed to the modern ear. Nevertheless I think it would be a false judgment to regard this meagreness as a measure of the state's concern for the distress of the weaving body. See Ch. VII. for a discussion of this point.

contributions, or, as in the case of large towns, made an assessment of its own. The funds obtained were used to relieve the sick and the aged, either at home or in hospitals; to take care of orphans and lunatics; and to assist widows with young children. But for able-bodied poverty there was no relief, nor had there ever been any tradition of relief to the able-bodied poor in ordinary times. But in the thirty years between 1815 and 1845 the times were not ordinary, and the periodic depressions combined with the movement of the population into the industrial areas, imposed a strain on the traditional system which had brought it to breaking-point by 1845.<sup>1</sup> When in 1842 the Disruption of the Scottish Church rendered it unable any longer to attempt to make itself fully responsible for the poor, the system had to be abandoned in favour of an assessment on the English model.<sup>2</sup> In 1845 the new Scottish Poor Law introduced the principle, albeit most limited in practice, of relief for able-bodied poverty.

However this was as yet in the future. A generation of

weavers grew up in the twenty years of distress preceeding

1. In 1813 Glasgow relieved 2,000 legal poor; in 1830 more than 5,000. Cleland. *Annals of Glasgow*, 1816, ii.p.426.
2. The Church was by no means wholly against the assessment principle. It was divided in its counsels. A good many clergymen who had earlier defended the "voluntary" system became convinced by events. See Rev. Robert Burns, *A plea for the Poor of Scotland*. 1841.



the Act. In these years the lack of a legal aid to the able-bodied poor was made good to a certain extent by the voluntary efforts of individuals, societies, and municipalities. These effects rose to a peak during such years of distress as 1819, 1825, 1837, and 1841-2. In 1819 we hear of men being set to work to break stones on Glasgow Green. It is unlikely that many weavers were among them.<sup>7</sup> In 1825 a Relief Committee was set up in Glasgow which distributed large sums collected for relief. The aid was general but no doubt weavers were amongst those benefited. But by 1837 the distress of the weavers had become so serious that in the depression of that year the weavers were in the forefront of the ranks to be relieved, and the Relief Committee set up in that year in Glasgow had as its main object the assistance of the distressed weavers.<sup>1</sup> Other towns also set up relief funds and organised working parties to give employment to the unemployed. In Glasgow and Paisley the scale of operations grew so great that sub-committees were set up with paid officials to organise relief.<sup>2</sup> In both these towns the population of weavers was very high.

In Glasgow at a public meeting in May 1837 a committee

1. ~~"The greater number of men we got employed were weavers: of this class we had 2884 on the fund. The great disposition of weavers may be accounted for by the fact that that fund was raised more especially with a view to assist the Hand-loom Weavers."~~ Charles Baird. *Observations Upon the Poorest-classes of Operatives in Glasgow, 1837.* pp. 4 & 5.
2. See below p.p. 139-146

was formed and a subscription list opened.<sup>1</sup> £5,000 was collected in a short time to which a balance of £3,000 from a former Relief fund was added.<sup>2</sup> The activities of the committee were to be two-fold : to provide work for those who were able; and to provide soup and bread to those who were not.<sup>3</sup> Of the men assisted by the Soup-fund the weavers formed about two thirds of the total; of the women and girls only one fourteenth were weavers.<sup>4</sup>

The committee had two paid officials, one to manage the fund, and the other to be in charge of the weaving department. This department distributed webs to those weavers who applied for relief who were unfit for outdoor work. Most of the work offered to the unemployed was of the stone-breaking and digging kind. The committee had some help from the River Trustees in providing work and in managing the men, and it also could call on the poor-rate authorities for help in investigating cases, but by and large the unemployed were maintained, in so far as they were maintained, during the depress-

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1. "The first motion was moved by Sheriff Alison, which was to the effect that we should turn our attention in the first instance, to the providing of means for the assistance of that class." (weavers). Rep. Poor Laws 1844 App. I. Q.7001.

2. Ibid. Q.7001. See Appendix. Table 3.

3. "We could never specify the number that were on the soup-fund; but at one time there were 6,500 on the fund." Ibid. Q.7008.

4. See Appendix., Table 4. p.

ion of 1837, and the years that followed to 1843 by this private charitable organisation.<sup>1</sup>

When in 1842 the distress became acute again the Relief Committee of 1837 which was still in existence was reorganised to work at greater pressure. Clerks were engaged to sit in a central office from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. and from 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. to take down particulars from applicants for relief. Each applicant was given a schedule to fill in which was submitted to a small committee, a sub-section of the main Committee. This committee met daily.<sup>2</sup> If the applicant was considered a suitably deserving case he got work, or rations of soup and bread.<sup>3</sup>

With the years of practice the administration of the fund grew in efficiency but the difficulty in obtaining sustained contributions grew likewise. Without large subscriptions from the banks the Relief Committee could not have carried on and as it was it had to turn away many applications.<sup>4</sup>

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1. A certain amount of help was received from the London Relief Committee.
  2. Inspectors were employed by the committee to check each applicant's statements and the committee acted on their evidence. "It was only after several years' experience that the Glasgow committee saw the necessity of appointing inspectors to have the cases fully reported on. The fund was infinitely better managed after we did appoint paid inspectors." Rep. Poor Laws 1844. App.I.M.E. Q.7006.
  3. They only took on to the roll those able to work; but they were obliged to give support to many unfit to work. Ibid. Q.6765.
  4. Ibid. Q.7010.



It was obliged to raise the residence qualification from one year to three years. At the same time it found difficulty in finding profitable work for the men to do. The stocks of broken stones accumulated over the years and hung like a dead weight on the committee.<sup>1</sup> The work was hard and unpopular, and the earnings small.<sup>2</sup>

By 1843 there were few weavers left on the roll and no webs at all were given out.<sup>3</sup> This year marks the end of the phase of pre-1845 voluntary measures of relief on such a scale. Glasgow had had a tremendous problem of relief in these years, and on an enormous scale, but from our point of view perhaps the problem of Paisley, though smaller, is even more interesting. Paisley was a town almost wholly given over to weaving, and in the years 1841-2 the depressed state of the trade plunged practically the whole town into distress.

Here as elsewhere there was no recognition of the claim

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1. "At present stone-breaking is unprofitable. A dead stock of 5,000 - 6,000 worth of broken metal has been accumulated." Ibid. Q.6766.
  2. "We try as much as possible that their earnings do not exceed 1s a day, that they may be looking out at all times for work to themselves." Ibid. Q.6771. "Some never made more than 2s (weekly), others again made 7s or 8s." Ibid. Q.6781.
  3. "What class are employed at present? (1843) - "a class different from that of last year or 1837. The greatest proportion of unemployed males were then weavers. At present I do not think there are more than from 20-30 weavers on the roll." Ibid. Q.6761.

of the able-bodied to relief.<sup>1</sup> But there had been in the previous twenty years considerable experience of meeting the extraordinary distress amongst the weavers with extraordinary measures. The gentlemen of the town and countryside around were accustomed to raising and organising Relief Funds to assist unemployed weavers through periods of depression.<sup>2</sup>

In 1841 a tremendous gloom settled over Paisley. A high percentage of the weavers were skilled men working on costly materials for which there was no steady market. For about twenty years the foremost article of production had been the imitation Indian Cashmere shawl, which was executed in a great variety of exquisite patterns which took so much time and labour that the finished shawl was a costly article. But expense alone was not the sole bogey. Fashion was a tyrant even more to be feared and when the popular Cashmere shawl went out of fashion in the early forties it struck a

1. There was an assessment which was used to provide funds for the Town's Hospital. There was also a joint committee of the Kirk Sessions of the three churches, which distributed relief among the members of each parish church. In neither case were any funds allocated to simple distress. Old age, sickness, widowhood etc, were the objects of the fund.
2. In 1827 the Renfrewshire Relief Fund was donating £500 a week, raised from local subscriptions, and from the London Relief Committee. In three months it had disbursed £22,000, chiefly to families of native weavers, the number of distressed families being as high as 2,700 at one time. J. Handley.op.cit. p.142.

blow at the Paisley weaving industry from which it never recovered.<sup>1</sup> A great part of Paisley was plunged into unprecedented distress.

In addition to this the town itself went bankrupt, involving many small investors in total ruin.<sup>2</sup> The Cart Navigation Trust also failed and a number of working people lost their money. Moreover a good many of the Friendly Societies, from whom the operatives expected help at such a time lost their funds in the failure and were able to pay nothing. A crowning blow was added by the exceptional severity of the winter of 1842. In the face of these distresses two Relief Funds sprang into being.<sup>3</sup>

The manufacturers of the district in November 1841

opened a Relief Fund for the workers of the town. They raised

1. It is recorded that Queen Victoria made a generous effort to boost the trade by buying 17 shawls. However, it seems that it was totally beyond the Queen's power to restore the shawl, or indeed any other garment, to fashionable shoulders, and it is only to be feared that this may have hastened the end.
2. "Is it consistent with your knowledge that part of the distress in Paisley arose from the losses sustained from the corporation; were there many weavers and others who had sums invested?" "Yes; and a great many societies".."Those who have lost money; those who had lodged money with the corporation - are not able to recover it?" "Not a shilling hitherto. Instead of paying part of the principal, they made 2½% of a dividend." Rep. Poor Laws. 1844 App. I M.E. Qq.11713 & 11716.
3. "I need scarcely ask you whether these losses by individual workmen rendered it necessary to raise a greater fund for the unemployed than otherwise would have been called for?" "I think that is self-evident. But it had the same effect in a different way. It made persons in authority feel that they were bound to do something for those poor people who could not get their little savings out of their hands." Ibid. Q.11722.



subscriptions from town and country to the sum of £9,160 of which they drew nearly £8,000. The method of relief was to hand out webs for weaving to all who asked. The average rate of wages paid was 5s.7½d a week. This was rather below the average rate for the previous year.<sup>1</sup>

This fund, from the very nature of the relief, gave its assistance almost entirely to weavers.<sup>2</sup> In all it gave out in the period while it lasted, from November 1841 to September 1842, 4459 webs.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, this was not nearly as many as could and would have been given had the demand been greater. A shawl manufacturer, who acted as manager for the Manufacturers' Relief Association describes the position. "When we had 50 webs ready, we sent for 50 weavers. We took them as they stood on the roll, but of these we only got 3 or 4. Next day we sent for another 50, with a similar result. I stated to the committee that they would not work. After that we took them promiscuously; we said, Come to us, and we will give you all work. We were then told by the other

committee that we had not work to give them. We took a list

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1. The Paisley average was higher than that of the South West in general because of the high percentage of skilled weavers. (From this sum 10d to 1/- has to be deducted for expenses).
  2. Also starchers, heddlemakers, winders, reedmakers.
  3. Rep. Poor Laws 1844 App. I M.E. Qq.11145-11150.  
For table showing numbers of weavers employed see Appendix, Table 5.

of all that called for work, and kept a list of all the webs; and on the 22nd of January, 1842, we had on hand 271 webs, for which we could not find workers. We still have on hand to sell about £1,400 worth. Some were sold at less than 30% on cost."<sup>1</sup>

The manufacturers blamed the General Relief Committee for giving relief to men who could have worked at their webs. "I think the members of the Relief Committee took them on their roll when they must have known we had webs to give them."<sup>2</sup> The Relief Committee replied that the manufacturers did not give enough in payment for their work. At one time there were 160 operatives working for the manufacturers who were also getting relief from the General Relief Committee. Moreover, the committee did not strike off its rolls those weavers who had refused to take webs from the Manufacturers' Association. In fact the two Relief Committees did not work harmoniously together.

The General Relief Fund was devoted to providing work for those not employed by the Manufacturers' Association. The work offered was field work, - digging and stonebreaking. Their wages were partly paid by the farmers on whose land

the men worked, and the remainder made up by the fund. The

1. Rep. Poor Laws, 1844. *M.F.* App. I. *M.E.* Qq.11145-11150.

2. Ibid. Q.11158.

average rate of payment for stone-breaking was 1s. to 1s.8d. per day, but with a maximum weekly wage of 11s.2d. It is unlikely that this maximum was reached by any but the youngest and strongest, but even so it seems clearly more remunerative work, though harder, than weaving the webs offered by the Manufacturers' Association. Over the winters of both 1841-2 and 1842-3 the General Fund was kept going and as much work as could be procured was offered to the men. There were a few women on the Fund, mostly those who had lost their work of sewing "boarders" on to the shawls. There were in addition a few persons on the Fund who, for reasons which are not clear, were not required to do any work in return for relief.

It is impossible to say how many of the Paisley weavers fell at one time or another on the Fund. Some there certainly were who managed to avoid it and struggled on on their own.<sup>1</sup> Some were helped by small advances from members of the kirk sessions. Some were given credit at the shops on the strength of their own good character. Some were members of Friendly Societies, and some depended on their savings.<sup>2</sup> But their security was short-lived. When the town went bankrupt in 1842 provident and improvident were brought low together.

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1. Ibid. Q.10679.

2. See below Ch. VI pp. 165-174



A widespread impression prevailed in the country as a whole that the improvident in Paisley greatly outnumbered the provident. It was felt that the distress was due, to a great extent, to <sup>the</sup> unsatisfactory character of the inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> They were said to be unprincipled, and manufacturers in Glasgow were not at all anxious to give their webs to the Paisley weavers. They complained of being duped. And even the Paisley manufacturers sent work to the villages around, finding that they got their work more cheaply done and more honestly returned.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that this situation arose because so many of the Paisley weavers were skilled weavers who may have accepted the plain work when obliged to but at once deserted it for figured work if the chance arose, making only a poor or unfinished job of their plain web. This might well earn them the name of being unreliable. Nevertheless the general unpopularity of Paisley with other towns which had weaving populations of their own may well have been due to the frequency with which appeals had to be raised for

1. "I consider it (Paisley) to be the most dissolute and ignorant community in Scotland, without exception." Evidence of Mr. William Muir, Secretary to the Edinburgh Committee for distributing funds to the poor. Rep. 1844, App. I. M.E. Q.2712.
2. "There were more webs given out to distant parts than would have employed all the unemployed in Paisley at the time, had the Paisley manufacturers chosen to do so. Ibid. Q.11711.

Paisley. Perhaps the bonds of sympathy had become strained.

The distress in the country in general in the years 1837, and 1841-2, was probably not as acute as in Paisley, which was almost wholly devoted to weaving, but it was sufficiently severe to induce the larger towns to form relief committees to assist their own unemployed poor. In Edinburgh a local committee was set up to provide work - mainly breaking stones on the Meadows for macadamising the Meadow Walk. Few weavers were employed on this.<sup>1</sup> But Edinburgh also set up a committee for distributing funds allocated by the Central Relief Committee in London. In this way relief was sent to many small weaving centres. Paisley figures prominently on the list also. But the larger towns, such as Glasgow, Greenock, Aberdeen, and others which had formed their own local committees, sent nothing to the Central Board directly, except in so far as their citizens contributed to the appeals and church collections which were taken throughout the country and sent to the Central Fund in Edinburgh.<sup>2</sup>

Outside the organised relief committees of the large towns the countryside faced its own problems locally on a

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1. *Ibid.* Q 2702.

2. No dissenting congregations contributed except in a few instances in Edinburgh.

much smaller scale. The most usual form of relief in a small town or village was the Soup-Kitchen. This met with varying success. For instance it is interesting to compare the views of William Anderson, an Elder, with Thomas Calder, a weaver, on the Soup-Kitchen at Kirkintilloch. William Anderson: "During the late depression in trade we had a good many out of employment; but the same individuals were not idle a long time, sometimes about eight or ten days. When one web was done and they could not get another, there was a soup kitchen established for their relief.<sup>1</sup> A subscription of about £93 was raised for this purpose commencing about September 1841, and the amount of upwards of 800 £ left for the benefit of the poor by a Mr. Adams of London, was applied to the same purpose. The soup kitchen lasted about half a year - 116 were relieved on an average in a week."<sup>2</sup> To which must be added, "There was a soup kitchen set up to relieve the distress; but very few and indeed I think none of the respectable weavers had anything to do with it. Those who have usually taken advantage of a soup kitchen in this town have generally been individuals who would take it all the year round if they could get it."<sup>3</sup>

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1. A choppin of broth and a penny roll daily was the ration.

3 choppins for a family was the maximum.

2. *Rep. Poor Laws. 1844. App. III p.384.*

3. *Ibid p.382.*



Similarly at Kilmarnock, where £280 was spent on the soup-kitchen in 1841-2, the "respectable class" of weavers would not apply and so it was given up early in 1842. A fund of £430 which was raised was distributed as relief. At first no work was required but later road-making was organised and £1,000 was borrowed for making webs which were given out to weavers.<sup>1</sup>

In some of the country districts the weavers were less fortunate. In Fenwick, a small village in Ayrshire, for instance, there was great distress among the able-bodied unemployed, principally weavers. No subscription was raised for their relief and they could obtain nothing through the ordinary channels of the Poor Fund of their parish. A few found employment as day labourers.<sup>2</sup> What became of the rest is not recorded. Yet these for the most part were respectable people. In the nearby village of Dalry the only fund for relief was a collection of upwards of £20 raised by the ministers and kirk-session. The largest allowance given (from first to last) was 6 shillings. A deputation of 'weavers and others' waited upon the local landowner to make a representation of their great distress. "He ordered the road-surveyor to make arrangements in breaking stones, to

1. *Rep. Poor Laws*. 1844. App. I. p. 718.

2. *Ibid*. App. III. pp. 493-4.

give employment to all who applied, and all who went were set to work. I do not think above 15 went."<sup>1</sup> As with the soup-kitchens so with the stone-breaking. Not all those who were in need of relief in those years were able to accept it in the forms in which it was then offered.

There was for a time the idea that Emigration might prove a more acceptable form of relief to the weavers. Emigration on a notable scale began in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century. During this period the number of emigrants showed a marked rise, especially from Scotland and Ireland. In England the movement did not set in with equal force until the mid-twenties.<sup>2</sup> This distinction between the countries has sometimes been attributed to the absence of a Poor Law in Scotland and Ireland. It was thought that men who were thrown more quickly onto their own resources (as in Scotland) might have turned to emigration sooner than

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1. Ibid. p. 495.

2. Helen I. Cowen. British Emigration to British North America. 1783-1837. University of Toronto Studies. Vol. IV. No. 2. Ch. VI.

those who could apply to their parish for relief. On this view one would expect to find large numbers of weavers among the emigrants. But in fact, where the returns give the occupations of the heads of families emigrating on their own initiative, they seem mainly to have been members of the class of small tradesmen and mechanics, rather than the destitute. What seems much more likely to have accounted for the preponderance of Scottish emigrants during this period was the fact that the Highlands were undergoing an organised clearance whereby many families were being compulsorily emigrated by their landlords. This may well account for the numbers leaving Scotland in the first 30 years of the century. In support of this theory there is the fact that the numbers emigrating from Greenock, the usual port for embarking the Highlanders, are much larger than those from all other ports.<sup>1</sup>

Of the Scots emigrating it is no doubt the case that there were a certain number of weavers who were able to emigrate on their own. But as far as the records permit a judgment it seems likely that the only emigration of

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1. See Returns re Emigration. Accounts and Papers Vol. XXVI, (1832) p.280. See in particular the returns showing emigration from Campbelltown, Greenock, and Stornoway to the British Colonies in America in the years 1825-32. In the years 1825-32 more persons emigrated to the U.S.A. from Greenock than from all other Scottish ports put together.



weavers in any number was that which took place with the assistance of government grants in the years 1820 and 1821.<sup>1</sup>

The attention of the government was first turned seriously to the idea of assisted emigration in 1817 when a petition for help to emigrate was laid before it on behalf of the cloth-workers of Yorkshire. This was refused, but two years later a government proposal was passed by Parliament to assist 300 distressed families from Yorkshire to emigrate to the Cape of Good Hope.

In the following year Parliament approved a Government proposal to assist 2,000 Scottish weavers to emigrate to British North America. A great many weavers had joined Emigration Societies formed in the winter of 1819/20, in Glasgow and the surrounding districts. These societies were holding public meetings and addressing petitions for assistance to the Home Office, and, in the knowledge that the subject was under debate in Parliament, interest in emigration grew apace and hopes soared. But the offer of assistance when it came was a great disappointment. The settlers were not to be granted a free passage. There was to be a grant of 100 acres of land each, subject to the usual settlement duties, and seed corn and implements were to be sold to the

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1. See below p. 154.

settlers at cost, and capital provided in instalments of three, three, and two pounds, which was to be repaid by the Emigration Societies jointly at the end of ten years. But the grant of a free passage would have meant more to the would-be emigrants than all the promises of assistance on the other side of the Atlantic, because so few had the means to cross it on their own. The Emigration Societies made the selection of emigrants from among their members but they could not provide sufficient funds. In the end a private subscription and loan was raised, sufficient to send out 1,200 emigrants.<sup>1</sup>

Those members of the societies who were left behind redoubled their efforts, and another series of petitions reached the Home Office. The government decided on a further measure of assistance and requested a committee to make a choice of 2,000 weavers from the applicants presented by the various societies, roughly six thousand in number. In the end 1,883 persons from Lanarkshire, Dumbarton, Stirling, Clackmannan, and Linlithgow were embarked. They joined the first settlers at a site of the name of New Lanark in Upper Canada.

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Much has been written of the hardships that faced the  
1. Cowan. Op.cit. p.86.

pioneers, both on the journey and in the new homes, but from such accounts as have been kept of these weavers it seems that the miseries were more than made up for by the independence and simple comfort achieved in a comparatively short time. Among the weavers there was no doubt about the success of the venture. Even the least prosperous thought themselves well off in comparison to their brethren at home. This is remarkable in view of the fact that at first sight the weavers, from the nature of their previous work, would not seem to be suited for emigrant life. In general they abandoned the loom when they quitted this country. They went not as weavers but as unskilled labourers, and even where their success was only very moderate in their new life they seem to have been glad to exchange it for their life at home.<sup>1</sup>

In purely financial terms the venture must be regarded as a failure, and was so regarded by the government of the day. Not a penny of the advances made was ever returned, and in

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1. It was "nothing uncommon to see a poor Glasgow weaver who came...with scarce a stitch to cover his nakedness, strutting between the stumps of his trees as pompous as an Edinburgh magistrate." *Quoted in Cowan, op. cit. p. 91.*

Nevertheless this must be set alongside the many petitions of misfortune and disaster with which the requests for repayment were met.



the end in the year 1836 the government of that day remitted the debt.<sup>1</sup> As a measure of relief, which was the whole intention behind the venture, it seems unlikely that any effect could have been felt by the removal of so small a number.

The result of the venture however was that the Government began to consider whether emigration, assisted by State funds, might be a useful solution to the problem of an excessive labour supply in certain industries and areas. A Select Committee was appointed to sit on the question. The concern of the committee was to be as much with investigating the necessity for relief as with emigration itself. It began its sittings in March 1826 and in the first session reported generally on the evidence before it. It found an excessive supply of labour, especially Irish labour, over the demand. During the summer of 1826 the depression in trade created a tremendous agitation by the weavers and the emigration societies for help to emigrate.<sup>2</sup> The committee resumed its invest-

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1. said to be more than £22,000 in addition to the cost of establishing the settlers. Cowan, Op.cit. p.92.

2. There were six societies in Paisley alone. The Lord Lieutenant of Renfrewshire caused an abstract to be made in January 1827 of the number of persons composing the societies in the county of Renfrew who had petitioned for aid. Of the thirteen societies six were situated in Paisley. The total number of persons, including children was 4,653. See Appendix. Table 6.

igations, paying special attention to conditions in the north. Finally in June of 1827 it put out a final report incorporating all its conclusions and going into much detail of how assistance to emigrants could be given, and where it thought such assistance would be useful.

The minutes of evidence appended to the Reports give a picture of a uniform desire on the part of the witnesses, and the men whom these witnesses represented, to get out of the country which, they said, no longer held anything for them.<sup>1</sup> Among the witnesses was the President of the Glasgow Emigration Societies, Joseph Foster, an operative weaver. He told the Committee that the members of his Society, who were mainly weavers, were determined that, if they got the chance of a fresh start, they would take up agriculture and have nothing further to do with industry.<sup>2</sup> The Committee put to him the question of funds. Had they any? Very little, but they could obtain more on the promise of Government

1. "Of course all the members of (your) society, if they could find an opening in their native country, would prefer it? - Yes but they see no possibility of doing it; they have no hope but of going to Canada." Select Committee of Enquiry on Emigration 1826. M.E. Q.148.
2. "If you went to America, and the option was given you of gaining your livelihood in some manufacture or trade, should you prefer that instead of taking to agricultural pursuits?" "We as a society, are determined, and my own opinion as an individual, is the same, not to meddle with manufacture; we are quite disgusted with it, and tired of it." Ibid. Q.122.

assistance.<sup>1</sup>

The committee then outlined to each witness the plan which it favoured, a rather complicated scheme whereby the loan was to be repaid by graded payments over a term of thirty years. The witnesses were practically unanimous in agreeing to the ability of the emigrants to meet these payments. But in the event the chance was not offered to them. While the Committee was sitting the Manufacturers' Committee for Relief made it known that it would contribute £25,000 towards Emigration if Parliament would vote £50,000. At this the Select Committee closed its deliberations and recommended the vote. But before the Report was tabled a return of prosperity in the country changed the whole aspect of the question. The government decided that the emergency was over and that the necessity for a grant was now removed. Plans for the project, already well under way, were abandoned.

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1. "To what extent could persons connected with your society pay the expense of conveying themselves to Canada?" -  
 "As a body I think they could pay nothing; but we applied to a number of wealthy and respectable citizens, and told them of our embarrassed circumstances, and we solicited their assistance in forming a fund to provide clothes and other necessities; they said they would in part assist us, and a number of them have subscribed, and others have promised they will yet do more when we are enabled to avail ourselves of it; they have subscribed something for the purpose of clothing and other necessaries." Ibid. Q.134.



The final negative to State-assisted Emigration was contained in the Select Committee's Report where it made it quite clear that in the general way it was not prepared to recommend Emigration as a permanent method of relief for Scotland as things stood. Here are the exact words. "Where the evils of a superabundant population are found to exist they are not in general under those circumstances to which Emigration could be applied as a permanent and effective remedy: and your committee would beg to remind the House, that they are not prepared to offer any recommendation in favour of Emigration, unless such collated measures can be taken as would prevent the occurrence of the evils complained of."<sup>1</sup> In saying this they are referring to the early findings of the Report; that the overpopulation in Scotland was in the manufacturing and not the agricultural districts. The removal of some operatives from a manufacturing area would only mean that their places would be filled by others, in fact by the Irish immigrants who "must shortly fill up every vacuum created in England, or in Scotland, and reduce the labouring classes to a uniform state of degradation and misery."<sup>2</sup> So that the final conclusion of the Report really was that until a system of relief could be devised to keep

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1. Report from the S.C. on Emigration from the U.K. 1827. p.14.

2. Ibid. p.41.

Irishmen at home it was useless to lay out money on parliamentary grants to assist emigration from Scotland.

The Government accepted the Report and undertook no further schemes in this period.<sup>1</sup> Without the assistance of the Government few weavers could emigrate. It was a great blow therefore to the would-be emigrants among the weavers when the Report of 1826-7, from which so much had been hoped, turned down assisted Emigration as a means of Relief.<sup>2</sup> Now only those able to call on the assistance of their local charitable committees or churches, or on their relatives and friends, were able to leave, and in the tremendous drift that took place from this country in the twenty-five years following the Report it must be supposed that the weavers formed only a very small part. It is not possible to say exactly how small. References are to be found to occasional groups of emigrants which were financed privately,

1. Under the persistent pleas of the weavers it made an offer to emigrants of free grants of land of 50 acres each. Two parties in 1830 were able to take advantage of this through the generosity of some of the citizens and Presbytery of Glasgow. The privilege was granted again in 1832 and a group sponsored by the Glasgow Emigration Society was able to sail for Canada.
2. Some weavers, in the ferment of expectation during the final sitting of the Committee had even gone so far as to give up the lease of their houses.

often by their churches or by interested men of means.<sup>1</sup>

These groups were usually very small. In the Emigration Reports of the thirties and early forties the occupations of the emigrants cannot usually be extracted from the total numbers given. But where they can, the number of weaver emigrants seems to be small.<sup>2</sup>

Of course it must be borne in mind that quite apart from the difficulty of emigrating there was also a great disinclination among many of the weavers to do so. By no means all the weavers, any more than the Government, subscribed to the view that Emigration was a solution to their

1. One such group appears below. "I have a lot of letters addressed to Mr. Houston of Johnston who aided in sending them out. (a small party of weavers from Paisley). The letters are of a very pleasing and cheering description and he says he knows the parties, and can trust to what they say...there is not one who is not contented. They write that they are happy at their looms when the snow is eighteen inches deep on the ground; that there is no money, but plenty of meat, and drink, and clothes, and (they add) we want nothing more." Report of the Select Committee of Enquiry into the Poor Laws 1843. App. Pt.1 Qq.11689 and 11690.
2. See for instance Returns of Emigrants to New South Wales, Accounts and Papers vol XXVI (1832). Out of a list of 397 persons whose occupations were stated only 26 were weavers. Asked if Hand-loom Weavers would be welcome as emigrants to N. South Wales, Mr. W.A. Miles, J.P. replied to the Select Committee that they certainly would be, not as welcome of course as sawyers and blacksmiths and the like, but as shepherds they could command a good wage, and that their labour in any form would be welcome in a country in such need of colonists. Report of S.C. on Emigration 1842 p.118.



difficulties. In the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commission of Enquiry into the Petitions of the Handloom Weavers in 1839 the weavers' spokesmen declared emphatically that Emigration was not deemed acceptable by the weavers generally as a means of relief. The numbers would have had to be immense, they claimed. They thought it infinitely preferable to 'bring the food to the people' and in this connection pressed strongly for the repeal of the Corn Laws, along with other reforms.

There were political elements among the weaving body who regarded Emigration as a form of escapism and thought their duty lay in bringing about a political reform. At a public meeting in Glasgow in June 1819 Resolutions favouring Emigration were met by vigorous opposition from a section of the meeting. One spokesman told the meeting that.."the low wages of the weavers did not arrive from a superabundant supply of hands, nor from any want of internal resources, but from excessive taxation and misrepresentation in Parliament...he thought...that even were their petitions (for emigration aid) answered, it would not by diminishing the number of hands have any effect in raising the wages of those who remained. He instanced the Irish, who were not, he said, in the least benefited by the emigration to

Scotland. He moved an amendment to the resolution, that there should be annual parliaments, universal suffrage, and a diminution of taxation."<sup>1</sup> The amendment was carried.

Amongst those who boasted no knowledge of either economics or politics there was yet the very natural disinclination of skilled men to see their trade go without a fight. Many weavers, according to the witnesses before the Royal Commissions, accepted the fact that their trade could never return to what it had been before 1815, but they felt that the extreme of poverty in which they stood could have been avoided, and that there were still remedial measure, considerably short of emigration, which should be tried first.<sup>2</sup>

Finally there was the genuine fear of exchanging the known for the unknown, which, though it may be supposed to have less weight with the destitute, affects most of us, and combined with the extreme difficulty of obtaining a passage, and the rigours of the same passage, was probably enough to deter many a wretched weaver from trying to reach "thae weary colonies."<sup>3</sup>

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1. *Answer in Cowan. op.cit. p. 54.*, from *The Caledonian Mercury*, June, 1819.

2. See below Ch. VI.

3. So described by the mother of an emigrant weaver son. David Gilmour, *Op.cit.*, p.13.

And so the great question of Emigration, - government-assisted Emigration - dangled, the subject of endless debate, before the weavers for almost a decade. But in the end it left them, both those in favour and those against, very much where it found them.



CHAPTER VISELF-HELP

It seemed that it was left to the weavers to help themselves. It is not possible for the investigator one hundred and more years later to say how much and how often kindly help was given from one family to another in times of sickness, or unemployment, or ill-luck. He can only pursue such lines of research as are recorded, and thus present a disembodied tale of such public activities as the weavers were known to be engaged in. These took two forms: in the first place to provide a means of temporarily alleviating their distresses, and in the second place; if possible, to remedy them by removing the causes. Into the first category fall the weavers' Friendly Societies, and into the second their attempts at Trade Unions, and their efforts to negotiate Boards of Trade.

The Friendly Society, had an obvious place in the weaving trade. The absence of a State system of relieving the poor in Scotland made contributory societies essential to most trades. An early example of a Weavers' Society is to be found in the Fenwick Weavers' Society. The Account Book, happily preserved, gives a clear picture of the work of the

Society.<sup>1</sup> This society had various functions, such as buying in provisions wholesale,<sup>2</sup> hiring out reeds, and regulating the prices and standards of work, (they were customer weavers and did not work for agents at this time), but its activity as a friendly society is seen in regular entries such as "March 1, 1765, Given out of our Box to John Kirkland weaver in Finnick town being in trouble and in need, the sum of 2s.6d." Later we read, "Dec.4, 1765, Given to John Kirkland's Orphan this present day the sum of 5s.3d." The membership fee of the master weavers seems to have been 2s.6d yearly. For this sum they themselves received small payments if they were ill or in distress, and their widows and children also. For instance there is an entry of 8/- to one Mary Skirren, "the Widow of the Deceased Member Thomas Barr," for part of her house-rent, and this entry was repeated, in varying amounts, for 27 years afterwards, as long indeed as she survived her husband. The sums allotted and the subjects of the allotment seem to have been within the discretion of the committee and not made in acknowledgment of any claim, other than on the goodwill of the society. Other early Friendly Societies amongst the

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1. This MSS. is in the hands of the Rev. Andrew Faulds, of St. Bride's Manse, New Lanark, who very kindly let me see it.
  2. It seems to have been an early example of a co-operative victualling society.

weavers were probably the same in this respect, although not engaged in the same breadth of operations as that at Fenwick. This remarkable little Society was finally dissolved by its remaining three members in 1873.

Small friendly societies were probably to be found in most weaving districts, but details are scanty.<sup>1</sup> It seems that these earlier societies required only small entry fees, and the idea does not seem to have been to require a contributory sum from each member, sufficient to support him in sickness for any length of time, but simply to have a little money 'put past' in 'the Box' in order to be able to give occasional small sums to members in need. This is probably true of most of the early societies, but they were probably none the less valuable for that. A contributor<sup>2</sup> to Symons' report, writing of the four Friendly Societies at Govan in 1838, said that they had been invaluable to the weavers.<sup>2</sup> Symons gives the entrance fee of the only Govan Society which he found, as 1/- for the first fee, and 1s.1d each year thereafter. The benefits must have been very small, but the con-

1. Witnesses before the various Commissions of Enquiry of the thirties and early forties refer to societies in existence at the beginning of the century. For instance a witness from Paisley stated that there were about twenty societies in Paisley before 1810, "but most of them were on a bad principle and were dissolved." Rep. on Poor Laws 1843.

App. I. q.10,343.

2. Rep.1839, p.24.



tributions were small also. They were as much as the weaver could manage and they afforded him a little protection that was worth having.<sup>1</sup>

But in time even these small contributions could not be met and Friendly Societies in many districts petered out. Symons found a good deal of evidence of previous societies which, by the time of his enquiry in 1839, had shrunk greatly, or had been altogether dissolved. In Glasgow, in fact, he said that Friendly Societies had entirely ceased to exist. "Funeral Clubs are alone kept up."<sup>2</sup> This was probably true of a good many other districts, especially the plain cotton weaving centres where wages were lowest.<sup>3</sup> This is not of course to say that some weavers in these districts were not members of successful Friendly Societies, but generally speaking the fortunes of those societies which were run more or less exclusively by and for weavers declined with the fortunes of the trade, and in the plain trade at any rate were, by 1839, scarcely in a position to help their members much, even where they existed.

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1. E.g. Strathaven Society. The subscription was 4s. When a member had 5 years' standing he received 4s when confined to bed, and 2s.6d, if he could walk. "Twenty years ago there were 370 members (weavers), now only 150." Rep.1839, p.28. Similarly Airdrie Friendly Society was entirely maintained by weavers at a subscription of 4s a year. Ibid. p.26.
  2. Ibid. p.23.
  3. e.g. Dumfries, Ibid. p.38.

In the fancy trade and in the better-paid classes of work Friendly Societies were more thriving. In Kilbarchan,, for instance, a silk-weaving centre, the great majority of the weavers belonged to Friendly Societies, although even here the numbers had diminished.<sup>1</sup> In Paisley, the centre of the fancy trade, there were a good many Societies, twenty-four in 1838,<sup>2</sup> succeeding the 20 in 1810 which had been "founded upon a bad principle and dissolved." It appears that the better principle involved a higher contribution from each member to pay for regular sickness benefits.<sup>3</sup> As the contributions rose the memberships declined and it may be assumed that those who fell out were the poorest-paid weavers.<sup>4</sup> The advantages of friendly societies and the help they afforded to the weavers were, after wages had begun to fall seriously, confined to the upper ranks of the weaving trade. This was of necessity, but it severely limited the scope of this form of assistance to the trade.

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1. Rep. 1834. M.E. Qq.2537-9.

Symons in 1839 unfortunately does not make any mention of friendly societies in his investigations of the prosperous woollen districts, and naturally enough no woollen weavers were called to give evidence in the Commissions of 1834 on Hand-Loom weaving, or of 1833 on Commerce, Manufactures and Shipping, or in the Poor Law Reports and Appendices of 1843.

2. Rep. on Poor Laws 1843. App.I. Q.10,343.

3. Rep.1834, M.E. Q.1129.

4. "Do you think the lowness of the wages has induced them to withdraw from Friendly Societies?" "I am perfectly convinced of that, it has been the reason which has caused many to withdraw, and prevented numbers from entering." Ibid. Q.1130.

*See also Ibid. Q897*

The Paisley Friendly Societies suffered a severe blow from the bankruptcy of the town in 1842. They had already been heavily called on during the distress of 1837 onwards. In 1843 when the Report on the Distress (Paisley) was published there were stated to be nominally 36 Friendly Societies in the town. But of these more than half were dissolved, dissolving, or in a state of bankruptcy. And of the remaining eighteen said to be still in existence not more than four were in a state of healthy operation.<sup>1</sup> The others were obliged to suspend their standing laws in order to keep their members on their books.<sup>2</sup> This complete, temporary breakdown of operations aggravated the distress of that period exceedingly, striking an unexpectedly severe blow at the provident. And at Paisley, due to the number of skilled weavers there, the proportion of the provident was probably higher than elsewhere; at least the proportion of friendly societies was higher. The rates of allowance given by the best societies were 6s a week when unable to work, and

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1. Rep. on Distress (Paisley) 1843. M.E. Q.731.

Corroboration of this is found in the evidence given to the Enquiry on the Poor Laws of the same year. But here only one society, called the Young Friendly, was said to be in full operation, and another called The Equitable, which was crippled by a loss of £700 with the town, in partial operation. The others were all suspended. Rep. on Poor Laws 1843. App.I, M.E. q.11509.

2. Their members were unable to make the agreed contribution. On the other hand most of the societies were unable to pay any claims. The funds of a good many of the societies had been invested with the town or with the bank. Ibid. Q.11713.



10s. when confined to bed or the room. For these benefits the subscription at the age of twenty was about 12s a year, and at forty about 26s. a year.<sup>1</sup>

It was generally agreed that the existence of successful friendly societies was very beneficial to the character and way of life of the weavers, and public opinion was greatly in their favour.<sup>2</sup> Their merits of course were much clearer to see than those say of Trade Unionism or Chart(er)ism. Witness the evidence submitted by a Dr. Burns of Paisley in 1843. "I would entreat the Commission to recognise these societies strongly. I do not know any class of institutions that tends to bind more the working-classes in one healthful community than friendly societies."<sup>3</sup> Their failure was bound to provide a strong argument towards the introduction of a State assessment for the Poor. But in this connection an even more pressing argument was provided by the fact that by far the greatest and most destitute portion of the weavers were never members of friendly societies at all.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Rep. on Poor Laws 1843. App.I q.11522.

2. "Have you observed whether individuals after they belonged to them improved in their habits." "Yes, and I have the observation of the late Dr. Thomson in this town, who said that he could set down as well-doing men those who were members of Friendly Societies." Ibid. q.11514.

3. Ibid. q.10,343.

4. e.g. of Glasgow Symons says in 1839.."with regard to friendly societies in the poorer districts, the weavers seem too dejected to attempt helping themselves by these means, and, in fact, the necessary capital to begin with is generally wanting." Rep.1839, p.19.

It is not possible to say precisely what use the weavers were able to make of friendly societies in assisting themselves in their distresses. In the years before 1825, when their distress was not so acute, probably a good many weavers were members of societies and were able to call on funds occasionally in time of illness or unemployment or strike. But after 1825 or so, many weavers and friendly societies parted company, neither being able to support the other in a state of continuous emergency. By 1839 some large weaving areas, like Glasgow, seem to have had no weavers' friendly societies at all.<sup>1</sup> In other areas where societies existed and membership figures are given they seem to include only a very small proportion of the weaving population in the area.<sup>2</sup> It seems safe to assume that the friendly societies only succeeded in touching the fringe of the weavers' problem.

It is perhaps necessary to draw attention at this point to the use weavers made of Savings Banks, if only to say that it was very little. It is of course possible to find a few weavers among depositors when the occupations of members of a

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1. With the exception of a Funeral Society which had a membership of 1,000, Rep.1839, p.23.

2. e.g. Kirkintilloch 200 members; 1963 looms, Strathaven 150 members; 830 looms.

branch are listed.<sup>1</sup> On the East coast of Scotland the proportion of weavers was probably rather higher than elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> But in proportion to the total weaving population the number of Savings Bank depositors was infinitesimally small. An analysis for Paisley, where the best-paid of the cotton and silk weavers were concentrated, shows less than 150 weaver depositors in the year 1840.<sup>3</sup> The number of looms in Paisley at this time was about five and a half thousand.

One of the arguments put forward in favour of Savings Banks was that they would make the operatives less the victims of fluctuation in the labour market. Instead of being compelled to work extra hard and so intensify the glut which already existed, their savings would tide them over hard times.<sup>4</sup> Excellent as such advice was, those most needful of it were those least able to take advantage of it. Savings Bank depositors were not as a rule unskilled labourers.

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1. See H. Oliver Horne, A History of Savings Banks, 1947. He gives analysis of the membership of several branches. e.g. Dundee had 48 depositors on opening day; 4 were weavers. pp. 96 and 97 op.cit. Perth out of 78 depositors had 17 weavers p.97 op.cit.
  2. Dunfermline, out of 1770 male depositors had 413 weavers. Kirkcaldy in the first 100 depositors had 39 weavers. op.cit. p.98.
  3. See table 7 Appendix.
  4. This view was put forward by the North British Review in 1844. Quoted by Horne. op.cit. p.109.



They were domestic servants, artisans, and small tradesmen.<sup>1</sup>  
 The institution of the Savings Banks, excellent as it was in encouraging saving, was not able to help those who had nothing to save.

The obvious action for the weavers to have taken with a view to self-help would have been to form a combination. But the great difficulty in combination, which the weavers never succeeded in overcoming, was the dispersion of their number into scattered units which could never be sufficiently united for effective bargaining with their masters. They were all individuals, working on different materials, for different hours, at different rates of pay. When they congregated it was not in their working hours, in great numbers, as for instance did the cotton-spinners, with conditions and grievances identical, but in their leisure hours in small knots in doorways and loom-shops. And such was the variety of their employers and employment that it was hard to know even what a man in the next street was earning, though he might be on identical work. The effect of this on the industry was paralysing and made hand-loom weaving, alone of all the skilled trades, the only one without a union after 1825.<sup>2</sup>

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1. See the conclusions of Home op.cit. p.97.

2. "Do you know any other bodies of persons, except the hand-loom weavers, who have not combined?" "I know none, in all my experience of the trades of Glasgow, that are not combined, except the hand-loom weavers. S.C. on Combinations of Workmen 1838. M.E. q.1413. (Corroborated by other witnesses.)

Even the unskilled trades were often combined in local groups, such as the Glasgow labourers who earned 2s a day at labouring in 1838, - more than most skilled weavers earned at that time.<sup>1</sup> The most that the weavers achieved during our period was to organize small local combinations from time to time, but these were temporary, and never established themselves or led to anything bigger. It was generally accepted that although all the other trades could combine, the weavers could not, and many attributed their great distress wholly to their lack of a union.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that this lack did aggravate their distress in a peculiarly severe way in that it not only left them with no bargaining power but also open to the gross overstocking of their own trade by the surplus labour of other trades.<sup>3</sup> This was the immediate and disastrous cause of their overstocked ranks. Though they could not get out, because of the combined state of other trades, others could get in, and swelled the numbers in the trade wholly beyond its natural limits.<sup>4</sup> This meant that the price of their labour fell and they all had to work doubly hard to make the same

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1. Ibid. Q.1424.

2. e.g. Ibid. q.1418.

3. Compare the spinning trade where the Cotton-spinners' Association only accepted as apprentices near relatives of operatives; or, on making an occasional exception, charged an entry fee of about £5.

4. Ibid. qq.1951, 2116.

wages as before; this led to a vicious spiral of increasing output and decreasing wages, and the resulting distress was quite incalculable. It would clearly therefore have been of immense advantage to the weavers had they been able to combine as a group, not so much to keep wages high - there was always after 1825 the power-loom to act as a check to rising wages - but to restrict their numbers to reasonable proportions, to what the trade would bear. The weavers were fully aware of this. Yet during our period 1815-1845, they never succeeded in establishing a union, and became more and more submerged by their numbers.

From their activities during our period it would be possible to think that the weavers had scarcely involved themselves in trade-unionism at all, and had left it wholly to other trades. But in fact the weavers had been pioneers in the field, staging a strike in 1787 over a reduction of wages, and again in 1812 in an effort to compel the masters to pay agreed prices. Both strikes failed, on the intervention of the authorities to arrest the leaders. The weavers had the misfortune to be active in trade unionism when the political atmosphere was very unfavourable to combinations,

(though they were not actually illegal in Scotland),<sup>1</sup> and

1. Combination finally became a crime in Scotland as a result of the weavers' strike in 1812. See J.L. Gray. The Law of Combination on Scotland. Economica Dec. 1928. Vol. VIII, p.342.



almost totally passive after combinations became legal in 1825.

The events of the great strike of 1812, although they occurred three years before our period begins, are nevertheless very important to the understanding of the later period, because in failing to secure its aims the strike really precluded the possibility of future successful combination in the trade. The strike arose, rather curiously, out of a Parliamentary Enquiry into the trade, and was conducted entirely without violence.

During the first decade of the century the Scottish weavers had twice made, in common with the English weavers, an appeal for Parliamentary intervention by petitioning for a Bill to regulate some aspects of the trade, and in particular to fix the minimum price of labour. The principle of a minimum price was not new, for there was still in existence an act empowering Justices of the Peace to fix rates of wages. Moreover it was specifically recognised in the Spitalfields silk industry by a Bill regulating both labour and apprenticeship, which had been in existence since 1773.<sup>1</sup> In answer to the first petition two Bills were passed in 1803, known as the Arbitration Acts. They regulated the description and methods

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1. Repeated 1819.

of giving out work, and laid down that all disputes were to be decided by summary process before the Justices. The second appeal, made in 1809-11, was for Parliament to fix a minimum price of labour.<sup>1</sup> This was rejected on the grounds that it would be ruinous to the operatives to restrict the trade and thereby cause unemployment, and that such restriction would infringe on the "free exercise of Industry, of Skill, and of Talent."<sup>2</sup>

When the weavers' delegates were in London to give evidence they were advised by several interested and sympathetic Members that their petition went against "the speculative opinions of the age", which were opposed to legislative interference in such a case.<sup>3</sup> Whitbread in particular told them that he thought they had no hope of obtaining regulation by the state, and he thought that they should make efforts on their own to limit the number of hands coming into the trade. The delegates came home fired with the desire to act immediately and restrict entry into the trade before it was too late, and plans were at once set on foot to form a Union.

Scotland took the lead. Although England had the larger

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1. Petition of Journeymen Weavers. Evidence was taken from all branches of the trade, manufacturers and operatives, and all were in general in favour of some form of regulation of wages.

2. Report on Petitions of Several Weavers etc. 1811, p.1.

3. A.B. Richmond, State Trials in Scotland, 1824, p.11.

share of the trade Scotland had by far the more valuable part in proportion to the number of looms, and also a decided ascendancy in the skilled trade, which as we have seen earlier, tended to produce a remarkable body of men.<sup>1</sup> Glasgow accordingly, and not Manchester, became the seat of active operations on behalf of both countries. Articles were drawn up on several heads: not to allow any persons into the trade without serving a regular apprenticeship of seven years; to restrict the number of apprentices taken by any one person; to regulate the transfer of journeymen; and to prevent frauds and embezzlement. These directives were published in newspapers, and printed and sent to all the manufacturing towns and villages.

The next step was to enforce these directives, and for this purpose a close federation was formed of affiliated societies, taking in every town, village, and district where weaving went on. Persons were appointed to superintend subdivisions of each district, who together formed local committees with power to call a general meeting. Central Committees were formed at Glasgow, Paisley, and Perth in Scotland, and at Bolton, Preston, and Carlisle in England, and Belfast in Ireland. Weekly meetings of delegates were held in Glasgow. According to Richmond, one of the leading

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1. See above Ch. IV, p.p. 109-112.



men on the central committee at Glasgow, the scope and efficiency of the organization were very remarkable.

Its strength was shortly put to the test. In January, 1812, the weavers decided to make a trial of the reality of the magistrates' power to fix wages. They sent a deputation to the Lord Provost of Glasgow asking him to call a meeting of the magistrates to receive a petition from the operative weavers praying them to exercise their powers to fix a reasonable rate of wages in the cotton manufacture. At first the meeting was refused, but on the weavers' offering to present the petition at the head of their united body it was granted. After a long conference a meeting of the trade was called at which two committees, one of eight weavers, and one of eight masters, met to discuss the question of price-fixing in the presence of the magistrates of the city and country. No agreement was reached and the weavers thereupon raised an action at the quarter sessions. They drew up a table of prices which, after a long and costly litigation (subscribed for by the weavers) was finally found by the Court of Session to be both reasonable and moderate.<sup>1</sup> This was however only declaratory, carrying no sort of compulsion with it, and with a few exceptions, the employers ignored the decision.

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1. The Court recommended a scale varying from £1 to 8s per week.

The weavers therefore decided to make a stand at once and abide by the prices they had fixed. They had fixed them of course without the consent or co-operation of most of the masters, but this was because the masters showed no disposition to give any co-operation at all.

Two days after the justices' decision the order went out from the Union's central committee that no work was to be done except at the price stated.<sup>1</sup> It was most unquestioningly obeyed by the great majority of the weavers, who had at this time the utmost confidence in their Union Committee. On the first day 20,000 looms stopped work, and in the next few days nearly double that number. Scarcely the sound of a shuttle was heard, we are told, from Aberdeen to Carlisle.<sup>2</sup> Everything remained in the most profound peace; no tumult or disturbance of any kind took place. "Nor was there ever such an effort made in this country. England could never have done it. Scotland could not do it now, without immediately producing riot and disturbance; fifteen years of progressive degradation have changed the character of her manufacturing population."<sup>3</sup> About 200,000 were affected by the strike, accord-

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1. The detail of much of what follows is taken from Alex. Richmond, op.cit. He was one of the leading members of the Union's Central Committee, and later suffered very severely for this connection. The book was written in 1824 to vindicate his own part, not in the strike, but in the subsequent events, in which he was commonly held to have played the part of informer.

2. Ibid. p.29.

3. Ibid. p.27.

ing to contemporary reckoning.<sup>1</sup> No help was expected or received from England or Ireland and the Union itself had no funds to deal with subsistence on such a scale. Friendly society funds were borrowed, and joint securities given for credit in various ways.

Three weeks passed and no work was done, except on the few fabrics that were given out at table prices. Suddenly, the committee was arrested, meetings were banned, and criminal proceedings begun against the leaders. Some of the strikers would have responded by violence but they were restrained. There were no personal assaults or damage except for a few cut webs. "Five pounds would have covered all the damages sustained."<sup>2</sup> The leaders were tried in 1813 before the High Court in Edinburgh. The trial aroused the greatest interest and excitement. No violence was proved and the only charge substantiated was that of simple combination.<sup>3</sup> Four of the leaders were imprisoned for sentences ranging from four to eighteen months, and those absent were outlawed. As a conclusion to the matter the Act enabling Justices to fix wages was repealed.

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1. Ibid. p.29.

2. Ibid. p.34.

3. For a discussion of the legal aspects of the case see article by J.L. Gray, The Law of Combination in Scotland. *Economica* Dec. 1928, pp.342-3.



The weavers were left in a sad state. Their confidence in their committee and the union was gone, and they abandoned it, leaving the committee encumbered with debts incurred under the strike. The weavers returned to work with nothing gained, and in so far as it was clearer than before that the masters had nothing to fear from their actions, their position had been weakened.

The abrupt ending of the Weavers' Union, after only two years' duration, had momentous consequences for the trade. The strike failed not from lack of combination among the men, but from the arbitrary action of the authorities in intervening directly on the employers' behalf. The weavers were unlucky in choosing for their big strike a moment when the political atmosphere was particularly unfavourable to any sort of action at all which could be construed as sedition. But in 1825 when the political atmosphere had changed somewhat and a similar peaceful strike would not have been proceeded against, the weavers were not in a position to make one. Uncontrolled entry into the trade during the intervening period prevented them from ever disciplining their body to the same extent again, and with every year the possibility of combination slipped further from their grasp. They went on for years trying to get Boards of Trade set up to regulate wages and

prices by arbitration, but they never as a united body took strike action again.

This rather detailed study of the pioneering efforts of the weavers in trade unionism is a necessary background to any commentary on the state of trade unionism among the weavers in the period 1815-45. For a decade after the strike there is silence on the subject of unionism amongst the weavers, except for the implication of a few weavers in outbursts of what would now be more properly called rowdyism than unionism. One such was the conspiracy, so called, of 1816-17, in all probability greatly magnified by the zeal of the government informers. It appears to have been nothing more than a secret organization, small in numbers, and banded together with no very clear idea of a purpose, other than that all were in favour of reform in general, and improvement of their own circumstances in particular. No "respectable labourers" were members, but a few poverty-stricken ex-union weavers were in the group. It was in no sense a union supported by weavers, and it does not appear to have had much organization. The leaders were arrested and charged with the felony of intending to subvert the established government and laws. The charge was not proven. But there was great rancour among the operatives against the government for encouraging the so-called

conspiracy by the use of informers, and tumultuous meetings of protest were held in the manufacturing districts of Scotland.

The suspension of Habeas Corpus followed in 1817. After a year it was lifted. A year of bad trade in 1819 aggravated the unrest. It should be remembered that in Scotland no parish relief existed at this time, as in England. A secret association was formed in Glasgow and it may be assumed that some weavers took part, simply because their numbers were so great, and their sufferings worse than any. In February, 1820, a general congress of delegates was held a few miles from Paisley. On April 1st posters were put up in the manufacturing towns calling the people to arms. Great crowds milled about but nothing more serious was attempted than a faint-hearted assault upon the Carron iron-works, and one or two attempts to seize arms. For his part in one of these,--the seizure of a fowling-piece from a farm house, which was later returned, - an old weaver of the name of Wilson was executed in Glasgow. His execution was clearly meant to be an "example", and the anger and disgust of the operatives were tremendous. At Paisley a similar "example" was frustrated by the firmness of a jurymen.

In 1824 we find the weavers taking up the question of a



union again. Seventy-one delegates from Glasgow and district met and adopted a constitution of twenty-four articles.<sup>1</sup> Reports of increasing support in the local branches were made at a second meeting. Each member subscribed 1d a week. At this meeting a manufacturer of the name of Hutchison was voted out of the trade, and orders were evidently given to obstruct his workmen because we later hear of a complaint of this being dealt with by the Justices. But in 1825, when trade became bad, the union was immediately affected, and we read, "The Weavers' Association in the West of Scotland seems to be gradually falling to pieces. At a meeting in Glasgow, which was attended by 53 delegates, very discouraging accounts were generally given of the state of the Association. The contributions are diminishing, and the members are dropping off, and taking work at under prices. A proposal was submitted for raising a joint-stock fund to carry on the cotton manufacture, and furnish work for the members of the Association, but it was negatived. The case of these poor men seems extremely hard. Their labour is heavy, and their wages small, and the improving state of the country seems to bring them no effectual relief."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Edinburgh Annual Register 1824 Vol. 17. p.219.

2. Scots Magazine, July 1825, p.114.

The destitution of the weavers acted as a great stimulus to unionism in other trades once combinations became legal in 1825.<sup>1</sup> This had the indirect effect of making the weavers' unionless condition worse, both by forcibly excluding weavers from entering other trades, and by driving surplus labour into their ranks.<sup>2</sup> Successful unionism in other trades, moreover, was an ever-present reminder to the weavers of what was lacking in their own. For instance, when the cotton-spinners struck for higher wages in 1837 skilled workers were earning 35s - 42s per week.<sup>3</sup>

Partial and local strikes among the weavers occurred at intervals, but nothing sufficiently effective to alter the downward trend of prices in the trade, or do more than arrest them temporarily. For instance, in April of 1829, a combination in the plain muslin branch of the trade forced up the wages paid by the regular manufacturers about 45% on what

1. "Many witnesses gave it as their decided conviction that the poverty of the weavers had been the fruitful cause of Trades' Unions amongst other artisans, who, seeing the extreme destitution the weavers were reduced to by successive reductions of wages, united for their mutual protection, to avoid falling into the same wretched condition." Rep. of S.C. on Hand-loom Weavers 1835, p. Xll.
2. "I am perfectly convinced that the distress of the hand-loom weavers is mainly and almost entirely to be ascribed to the exclusive monopoly established by the forcible conduct of the trade in all other lines which prevents them getting into any other line." Rep. of S.C. on Combinations 1838 Q.2116. "Are they able to obtain employment in mills?" "They would, but the combinations will not allow them." Rep. of S.C. on C.M.S. M.E. q.5625.
3. Ibid. q.5935.

they had been.<sup>1</sup> The result was that the "bowl cork"<sup>2</sup> manufacturers expanded and the regular manufacturers cut down. Then to keep themselves in the trade the smaller houses began to hand out work below the weavers' table prices. It was readily accepted because it was higher-paid than the "bowl-corks'" work, and so the combination broke up. It seemed that the only effect of the forced advancement was to throw the weavers out of employment.

In the next decade a few scattered references are met with <sup>to</sup> local organisations and strikes. For instance in Dundee a union of over 1,000 strong was publicly dissolved by its office-bearers when the linen manufacturers insisted on the operatives repudiating their union.<sup>3</sup> A more striking case of the same kind occurred at Lanark. Here in 1833 a union drew up a table of prices which was agreed to by the manufacturers and worked for some time. When eventually some weavers began to take work at lower prices the unionists took steps to prevent these renegades from beaming-up the webs.

1. Rep. of S.C. 1839 pp.55 & 64. The manufacturer who gave evidence on this also stated that a strike in 1826 of the muslin weavers had induced him to remove a considerable part of that work to Belfast, where it remained. The price-cutting between him and his brother made him a particularly unpopular manufacturer. It was his work that was boycotted at the meeting in 1825, see above p.186.

3. "From and after 22nd day of May, curt., no work will be given out to any person belonging to a Trades Union or similar association, and all persons applying for work will be required to sign a declaration disuniting themselves from that body." "The Dundee Constitutional" quoted in the Perthshire Courier 29.8.34.

2. So-called from their practice of employing agents to go up and down the country obtaining embedded work under the pretence of selling crockery or 'bowls'.



But the union was forcibly broken up by the Duke of Hamilton, with the further requirement that the funds of the union should be divided up amongst the non-unionists. The only town on the East of Scotland in which open violence took place in this period was Dunfermline. Here the unionists cut the work from the looms of those weavers who took work at reduced prices.<sup>1</sup> Rioting followed, and a few arrests were made, but it does not appear that the violence was approved of by the weavers in general.<sup>2</sup> The Dunfermline union seems to have been an exception to the general tenor of such unionism as existed in the trade, which was very peaceable and concerned mainly with negotiating tables of prices which would be acceptable to both parties.

In Glasgow, which had once been the active centre of trade unionism, all was quiet. At the time in the early thirties when an expansion of unionism was taking place in other trades, the weavers were giving up the idea of effective combination for strike-action in their trade, and were concentrating their hopes on introducing Wage Boards into the trade. In January of 1834, 300 delegates, claiming to represent 50,000 weavers, met in Glasgow and passed resolutions regarding these Boards of Trade. The idea was taken up

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1. Rep. 1839, p.186.  
 2. Ibid. p.186-7.

by the Maxwells of Pollok House, near Glasgow, father and son, successively members of Parliament for Renfrew. Though the Bill introducing Wages Boards to the trade was defeated, a Select Committee was secured in 1834 to enquire into the trade. A fuller investigation was undertaken in 1838-41. The Report of 1841, while making some recommendations, stated broadly that the condition of the trade was irretrievable. Thus the weavers' hopes of Parliamentary intervention were eventually dashed, but throughout the decade of the thirties this was what they worked for, and this was the aim which replaced trade unionism in their enthusiasms, and which distinguished them accordingly from other trades.<sup>1</sup>

The weavers of Glasgow and the West of Scotland maintained a union, re-formed early in the decade, not with any idea of compulsion of the masters, but purely with the view to obtaining some cohesion within their own body. They held public meetings, which anyone could attend, in the Glasgow magistrates' council chamber.<sup>2</sup> Hugh Mackenzie, a noted witness in the Enquiry of 1834, was the General Secretary of the Union until his death in 1842. It was not in the least a secret association,<sup>3</sup> and made no attempt at coercion,

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1. For a discussion of Wages Boards see below pp. 194-211.

2. Rep. 1834. M.E. Q.2817.

3. "You never made a secret of your combination?" "No, by no means; the whole town kens it." Ibid. Q.1095.

only sending a deputation to the Glasgow manufacturers when they thought an advance in wages was possible, or to remonstrate with a manufacturing house which they thought was reducing prices unnecessarily.<sup>1</sup> When Charles Baird was Secretary of the Relief Committee in 1837 he said he was surprised to find so many <sup>unionists</sup> weavers among the applicants for relief.<sup>2</sup> But he added, "It is but fair, however, to state that the Union or combination among the weavers, appears to have been of the most harmless description, merely, if possible, to get a general fixed rate of wages, and (so far as the writer has been able to learn) never productive of any of those acts of violence, or other great evils, which have characterised some Unions of other trades."<sup>3</sup> The Union that Baird probably had in mind was the Cotton Spinners' Association which had been productive of a good deal of violence since its inception in 1805, and which in 1837, in common with some iron-moulders, sawyers, and colliers, staged a great strike which is said to have affected as many as

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1. See their story of their dealings with the Hutchison Brothers on the eve of the Enquiry of 1838-9. Below p. 201. It was the idea of having some sort of standing machinery to deal with questions like this, and prevent flagrant injustices, that made them so anxious for Beards of Trade.

2. 1553 out of 3072 applicants. C. Baird Op.cit. p.171.

3. Ibid. p.171.



60,000.<sup>1</sup>

The weavers were not directly affected by the strikes. They were idle too, but not because they were on strike. The depression of trade had already hit them, and great numbers were out of work. But there is no evidence that there was any revival of active unionism amongst the weavers. When Symons in the following year tried to press the witnesses for information about any unions that they might have, he met with so much alarm on the subject in his first twenty witnesses that he was only able to get one who would so much as mention the words 'union', and 'strikes'.<sup>2</sup> But in his twenty-first witness he was more fortunate and got sufficient evidence to convince himself that in 1839 the

1. They struck against a reduction of wages (average 35s-42s per week). One witness before the S.C. on Combinations of Workmen said, <sup>that</sup> Only about 2,000 were affected. But opinion generally seems to have thought the strike unwarranted in the general state of distress which other trades, such as the weavers, were bearing. Cp. anonymous article in Blackwood's Magazine of March 1838 Nor.XLII, p.289. "The press, with the exception of the Liberator, the Trades' Union Journal, were unanimous in condemning it." A public subscription on behalf of the weavers had just been begun. See above Ch. V p.138.
2. See S.C. on Combinations of Workmen 1838 M.E. q.2116. Five of the Cotton Spinners' Union Committee had been sentenced to transportation. The severity of the sentences, passed on very dubious evidence, and the exaggerated reports of vitriol-throwing and mill-burning had produced a state of high tension. What really happened has never been fully elucidated but it is interesting to compare Sheriff Alison's and Advocate Gemmil's evidence throughout the Minutes of Evidence of the Report on Combinations of Workmen, 1838.

weavers of Glasgow and environs had no union, and were in no position to have a union, of the kind which existed in other trades.

The reasons emerge clearly enough. To begin with they were so much scattered, "over the whole face of the country",<sup>1</sup> as to make it extremely difficult though not impossible, vide 1812, to act in union. Secondly, they were at the disadvantage of themselves being the owners of their tools of production. The managers had less to lose relatively than where they had capital sunk in machinery; also it was easier to transfer work from places where weavers were combined to where they were not. And finally, if the weavers had been able to maintain a combination for any length of time the effect would have been, not to raise their wages, but to drive the trade into the hands of the 'small-corks' or cut-price merchants.<sup>2</sup> This was due, as has been seen already, to the conjunction of an over-supply of hands to the trade and the existence of the power-loom, which could be brought into operation wherever an advance in wages made it practicable. So that there was not in general any possibility of raising wages, more than

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1. Hugh Mackenzie's evidence. Rep. 1834 H.L.W. M. of E. q. 991.

2 *One half the one kind of* all the plain muslin manufacture in Glasgow in 1839 was either in the hands of bowl-corks or weavers selling direct to purchasers.

fractionally, above what the reputable manufacturers were paying. This was perhaps not always strictly true as it may be supposed that reductions in wages followed more rapidly upon changes in the trade than advances, and there may therefore have been a place for such machinery as was proposed in the form of Boards of Trade. But it was true enough to make it probable that combinations, conceived for the purpose of raising wages by compulsion of the masters, were of little use to the weavers, unless they could also at a very early stage have been successful in drastically cutting down the number of entrants to the trade.

The subject of combinations leads directly to the question of Boards of Trade.<sup>1</sup> The idea of such boards came to take the place of combinations in the hopes of the weavers and their sympathisers. What they could not effect themselves, by combination, they thought might be achieved in part, with the help of the government, by boards of trade. Their aim was similar, if more modest; to regulate, rather than to raise

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1. Boards of Trade have been included in the chapter on Self-Help, and regarded as such, in the sense that they had in the first place been proposed and instituted by weavers and manufacturers in the trade themselves, although they required the help of the government to extend the system to the whole of the trade.



wages, by mutual agreement between manufacturers and weavers. The boards were to be composed of an equal number of both parties who were to sit at regular intervals. They were to fix minimum prices for every class of work. These prices could of course be exceeded, and they could be reduced at the times fixed for revision, but for the period during which they were in operation they could not be undercut. The effect would be to create a stability in the trade beneficial to both operative and manufacturer, to cut out the remarkable differences that existed between the weaving prices paid by the various houses, and at the same time by making these prices compulsory, to ward off from the trade many speculators, and small manufacturers without capital.

Enthusiasm for the project was at its peak during the enquiries preceding the Report of the Royal Commission in 1835. So much evidence was collected in its favour and so much desire to see it in operation was evinced by the whole trade that in a further session of the enquiry definite efforts were made to obtain evidence from witnesses who were known to be unfavourable to the plan, but very little serious opposition to it was found.

The question was one of government intervention. As the weavers themselves had no bargaining power to put these boards

into operation over the country, and as the boards could not operate unless their decisions were binding on both parties, government intervention was required to bring these boards into being and to place them on a formal legal footing. The weavers thought themselves perfectly justified in making this request when they were, as they felt, so singularly the victims of another piece of government intervention in the operation of the Corn Laws. The attitude of the government was less clear.

In the early years of the decline of the trade, in the decade before 1815, the weavers had twice petitioned parliament, in 1808, and 1811, to fix a minimum wage in the various branches of the trade,<sup>1</sup> or if that were not possible, to devise a plan whereby an agreement on wages could be reached by the joint consultations of masters and operatives, "and to leave an umpire in case of any difference."<sup>2</sup> This petition was on

1. The idea was not new. The law empowering J.P.s to fix rates of wages was still in existence at this time and was specifically recognised in the Spitalfields silk industry, by a bill regulating the price of labour which had been in operation since 1773.
2. Report on Petition of Several Weavers etc. 1811, p.7. The idea was not very clearly thought out yet but something of the sort was put forward by several witnesses. "Do you mean a fixed rate of wages for the trade at all times?" "No; what I would be understood to mean is, the work at present is very bad, and the workmen have reason to complain, at another time it is good; whenever it is very good or bad let an umpire settle the wages. When the trade is good the men must have more wages; when it is bad, the masters must pay less." Ibid. p.8.

both occasions rejected,<sup>1</sup> but the idea was not dropped. As the trade continued to decline, and other prospects of relief, such as emigration, or even combination, faded, the weavers and their sympathisers came more and more to fasten on the idea of regulating boards as the only possible method left to them of retaining any stability in the trade.

The manufacturers also had an interest in the stability of the trade. The majority of them seem not to have been averse to the idea of regulating boards. The constant reductions in the prices of weaving upset their calculations and left them with stocks difficult to market at a remunerative price, and produced a general atmosphere of uncertainty and lack of confidence in the trade. It was generally agreed that the small manufacturers manœuvring on very little capital were the first to make reductions.<sup>2</sup> In flat seasons they were obliged to sell their goods below cost, and to engage weavers at lower wages, and although in the first instance they might simply get the worst hands, the reduction would gradually

1. On the grounds of impracticability, that it would ruin the trade and aggravate the distress by throwing many weavers out of work; and on the grounds of principle, that "no interference of the Legislature with the Freedom of Trade, or with the perfect Liberty of every individual to dispose of his time and of his labour in the way and on the terms which he may judge most conducive to his own interest, can take place, without violating general principles of the first importance to the prosperity and happiness of the community---." Ibid. p.1.
2. "I never heard of an instance of a large house being the first to reduce wages." Rep.1835. M.E. Q. 1712.



spread through all the other houses whether they wished to reduce or not.<sup>1</sup> The large manufacturers stood to lose most because the value of their stocks was constantly being threatened. These larger houses in general paid better wages than the small,<sup>2</sup> and they had an interest, alongside the genuine concern which many of them felt for the workmen, in keeping wages up, and cutting out the speculator and small capitalist, especially the "bowl-corks" and small weavers.<sup>3</sup> The Scottish manufacturers who were witnesses before the 1834 committee were all, with one exception,<sup>4</sup> in favour of the boards. If with government assistance the boards could be given a formal status so that the prices fixed would be binding on the whole trade, it seems that the manufacturers would have been prepared to give them a trial.

There were in existence in Paisley and Glasgow at this time boards which had been recently established in some

branches of the harness trade, and which were operating success-

1. Rep. 1834, M.F. Q.q. 319-323.

2. Ibid. 6.797.

3. --"there are always at all times manufacturers who are willing to give a reasonable price to their workmen, and would do it were they not afraid that they would be undersold in the market by others." Ibid. Q.793.

4. Mr. James Grant, Dundee. "As far as Dundee and Forfarshire are concerned I think boards of trade are unpracticable, uncalled for, and can do no good." Ibid. Q.3117.

His argument was that the linen trade was different from the cotton trade, that prices were generally uniform, and that it did not suffer from "capricious depressions." Ibid. Q.q. 3123-3138.

fully within their narrow limits. The first board had been set up in Paisley in 1830 to regulate the prices for trimmings, and had worked well and been extended to some silks and silk gauzes. The arrangements had been simple. Manufacturers and weavers had each drawn up a table of prices which they considered reasonable and handed them to each other for correction. The prices agreed on had been fixed as a minimum for six months; and on the success of the scheme it had been continued and extended.<sup>1</sup> It was said to have greatly improved the relations between masters and men.<sup>2</sup> The plan was taken up two years later in Glasgow in the harness branch, where it worked successfully. But only about 1,000 out of the 9,000 or 10,000 weavers in Glasgow were in the harness branch.<sup>3</sup> The difficulty was to establish similar boards in the plain trade. It was here that the government's assistance was needed. "In the plain department I represent, the thing is impossible; and if we could have come to as good an understanding with our employers as the harness-weavers of Paisley and Glasgow have done, probably we should not have troubled you at this time to insist on the establishment of a board."<sup>4</sup>

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1. There were about 200 harness manufacturers in Paisley. At first ten stood out of the scheme, but eventually they all came in. According to the Paisley harness-weaver witness the weavers had had no disputes over wages. Ibid. Q.883.

2. Ibid. Q.887.

3. Ibid. Q.1115.

4. Ibid. Q.1115.



In the plain trade the weavers had made desperate efforts to keep up the weaving prices of fabrics by canvassing those houses making the reductions the moment they heard of them, and representing to them strongly the injury they were doing to themselves, as well as to the weavers. It was an anxious and expensive business,<sup>1</sup> for it took up the time of weavers who could not afford to lose it, and it did not by any means always succeed.<sup>2</sup> When it did succeed it was often all too clear that the proposed reduction had been purely arbitrary, and had no connection with the state of the trade in general. An incident described by Hugh Mackenzie in a letter to Symons in 1838 gives an interesting illustration of this point, of which indeed there is abundant evidence. The firm of Hutcheson Brothers, a large house but with an ill reputation amongst the weavers, was reducing its prices. "Mr. Graham Hutcheson did not justify himself on the necessity of so doing on account of the market but boldly averred that it was

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1. Ibid. q.694, 687.

2. Success in any case could only be temporary. See Hugh Mackenzie's story of how when trade was good a manufacturer reduced prices, and refused to hear the weavers' remonstrance. The weavers moved rapidly and succeeded in arranging an effective boycott of his work. Within 24 hours the firm restored its prices. "The rest of the manufacturers appeared very thankful that we had taken such a step, because, finding we had beaten Mr. Dalgleish it would give more confidence to go on." Q.688. But within a very short time the weavers had to repeat the process to another firm. If trade had been very bad at the time they could hardly have done so.



because he could get the work done cheaper elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> It was in vain that the deputation represented the evil consequences, and that all the other manufacturers following in his wake, entailed unnecessary evil upon a great portion of the community. They were retiring very much cast down with the result of the interview, when Mr. Hutcheson observed, "Yes, by-the-bye, I observe by to-day's papers that a Committee is appointed in Parliament to inquire into the case of the hand-loom weavers." "Yes," said one of the deputation, "and this very instance of your arbitrary<sup>2</sup> reduction of wages without cause, will be a precious argument in the mouth of our witnesses to prove the necessity of establishing a board of trade." The observation told like a stroke of electricity. The two brothers exchanged a significant glance across the desk, and the deputation retired. It was not, however, an hour

when one of the foremen was dispatched after them, and informed

1. Because the weavers had no combination, or even intelligence of the trade in other districts but their own, they were an easy prey to this argument. For instance the manufacturer who "has work going in Girvan and Bathgate writes to his agent in Girvan that he can get his work cheaper in Bathgate, and if the weavers do not submit to a reduction he will withdraw it and send it somewhere else. He writes again to his agent in Bathgate to the same purpose, and thus these two towns, from their ignorance, being respectively afraid that they will deprive each other of work, generally submit; and it is by imposing upon the country places in this way, that many reductions have been effected in Glasgow." Rep. 1834, M.E. Q.698.

2. All underlined words are in italics in the original.

them that the prices were again restored; but much evil was already done, for the other manufacturers would not believe the circumstance, and it cost no little labour and lost time on the part of the weaver to convince them. You will, sir, immediately perceive from this, that there was no necessity at the time for the reduction else the prices would not have been restored. It was mere cupidity, and one manufacturer had it in his power, and still has the power of bringing down all Glasgow.<sup>"1</sup>

The weavers hoped that a board of trade would protect them against such sudden unnecessary falls,<sup>2</sup> and against the inequalities in the prices of weaving,<sup>3</sup> and if it did no more it would still be a tremendous improvement on their state as it was, and would rid them of the anxiety and inconvenience of constantly watching to see what all the different houses were doing. It would at the same time rid the "respectable" manufacturers of the constant threat of being undersold in the

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1. Rep.1839, pp.65-66.

2. "What you expect from boards of trade is, to prevent the running-down of wages by some individuals setting the example?" "Yes." "Contrary to the wishes of many manufacturers?" "Yes; what I would ask for boards of trade for is, to prevent them from being reduced without cause." Rep.1834, M.E. Q.q.952-3.

3. A man could change his master at the end of every web if he did not like the price. But in practice he did not do so because the loss of time in making such a change would probably cost him more than his gain in wage. Also it was evidently the case that weavers got advances on their wages, and these could presumably only be got from a warehouse where the weaver was known. Ibid. Q.838.



market by some small house that did not mind, or was obliged, to sell its goods at less than cost.<sup>1</sup> There was no intention of restricting the trade by a fixed minimum, as weaving prices were to be under constant revision, and there was no intention, or machinery, for forcing wages up, under the scheme. It seemed to the weavers a very reasonable measure, and their hopes of seeing it materialise were high. "There is a strong impression on their minds that Government may interfere in their behalf and establish something like a board of trade to regulate, not to cramp trade; a wholesome rule to establish an equalisation of prices, so that one manufacturer can go on with confidence, being assured that another cannot undersell him. Now the weavers of Glasgow and the neighbourhood all round are all alive on the subject, and have a complete reliance that Government will on the present occasion interfere in their behalf."<sup>2</sup>

A proposal was put forward by Hugh Mackenzie on behalf of the Glasgow Weavers' Association.<sup>3</sup> A committee composed equally of manufacturers and weavers was to be constituted

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1. The practice among small houses of getting advances from foreign consigning houses, based on an estimate of what the goods would fetch, was held to be responsible for many reductions, because if the goods did not reach in the market the sum estimate the difference was met by reducing the weavers' wages. "that has been always the mode found to pay best." Ibid. Q.751.

2. Ibid. Q.698.

3. Ibid. Q.789.



as a board of trade. There were to be three of these boards; one in Glasgow, one in Manchester, and one in Belfast. They were each to decide the minimum prices of weaving in their area for a fixed period of time, at the end of which the prices were to be revised. In the event of dispute the final arbiter was to be the Board of Trade in London. It was a very straightforward scheme, and though there might well have been difficulties in ensuring that the weaver had the same opportunities as the manufacturer for coming to a decision on the minimum wage, yet it had worked in the harness trade without dispute, and it might well have worked in the plain trade. At least it seems it was worth trying. It was very generally agreed that the disorganization within the trade was as much to blame as outside factors for the falling wages; neither manufacturers nor weavers wished to see further falls. Firm prices for weaving, even if they had only been adhered to over short periods, would have assisted both parties. The aim was modest; in the first instance to regulate wages; in the second, if possible, to raise them.

It is not possible now to do more than guess at what would have been the attitude of Parliament to this scheme had it fully considered it. It did not, and this was due to the remarkably unlucky circumstance that one of the weavers'

greatest well-wishers took up the scheme with enthusiasm, and put forward proposals of his own. These were drawn up in the form of a Bill, ready, if the 1835 Committee so recommended, to be put before parliament immediately. The Committee did recommend it, and the Bill was introduced in 1836, and was defeated. It seems clear now that this Bill had very little chance of success. It is possible that the Glasgow plan<sup>1</sup> might have had more.

In Fielden's plan wages were to be fixed for the various fabrics woven in each district by taking the average paid in the past three months by manufacturers accounting for more than half the work done in the district. The wage fixed was to be the minimum paid in that district for the next three months. The plan clearly presupposed that wages would rise; no provision was made for them to fall. If they rose during one period that average became the minimum for the next period, and so on. They could not fall below the last minimum fixed.

It is not difficult to imagine with what distrust the manufacturers viewed this scheme. Even the most well-disposed must have had doubts about committing themselves to a fixed minimum which could not under any circumstances fall, even for a short time. It was too rigid, too alarming to them to think that if they once raised wages they would be compelled to abide  
1. There was a very similar Bolton plan also.

by them. Fielden of course thought the alarm unnecessary. He was convinced that in time, due to the salutary effect that Boards would have on the trade, ~~that~~ wages would slowly rise. The Committee constantly queried this, threw doubt on it, and worried over the advisability of the fixed minimum.<sup>1</sup> But in the end they unanimously recommended that the government should accept Fielden's proposals. It seems a pity that they did not pay more attention to the Glasgow plan.<sup>2</sup> Its greater flexibility might have been much more acceptable. It relied more on the agreement of the two parties, which in this case really meant on the reasonableness of the weavers. But there was no reason to think that this would not be forthcoming, because they had a lot to gain simply by obtaining uniformity of prices within the trade, and even when wages were falling they expected to be protected by the boards from the kind of reductions to which they were in the habit of being subjected.<sup>3</sup>

The rejection of the Bill must have been a tremendous blow to the weavers. The most thinking of them, as well as the rank and file, had been concentrating on this measure as the most likely, and probably the only, hope of arresting, or controlling, the decline of their trade. Hugh Mackenzie,

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1. Rep. 1834. M.E. Q. 8014-8041.

2. Rep. 1834. M.E. Q. 789.

3. "If the manufacturers were only agreed among themselves we do not want to push the manufacturers to extremities." Ibid. Q. 2948.



for instance, who had never believed in the possibility of successful combination; who at one time had thought of emigration but had "turned from that"; who did not lay so much stress on the evils of the Corn Laws as did many witnesses; and who did not hope so much from their repeal; gave all his support to boards of trade. And he says that there were many like him, with whom he had talked over the past year. (1833-4).<sup>1</sup>

In 1838, when evidence was again taken, by the Assistant Commissioners, on this subject, the picture had changed. The enthusiasm of a few years ago had vanished and only a very lukewarm interest remained, except in Paisley where the boards were still working satisfactorily. Even in Glasgow where the weavers were still actually in favour of boards of trade, "the more extensive body of them anticipated no great benefit."<sup>2</sup> Most weaving districts were either indifferent or opposed to them, and only a small minority of weavers, were actively pressing for them.<sup>3</sup> Neither Symons nor Harding thought the weaving body as a whole interested in the subject. The great desire was now the repeal of the Corn Laws. "Other measures have been deemed desirable as palliatives of their condition, but I am bound distinctly to state, that the

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1. Ibid. Q.900.

2. Rep.1839. pp.23-24.

3. Ibid. p.71. These weavers belonged generally to Glasgow and Paisley; also to Airdrie and Lanark.

weavers in my district will be satisfied with nothing short of a total repeal of the duties on the importation of foreign corn."<sup>1</sup> This had become the pin-point of the weavers' hopes. "It is also the opinion of a large body of the weavers, that any law which should punish a man for taking what he thought fit for his labour, or attempt to force him to starve rather than take less than a junta of persons might decree, would be tyrannical. I am decidedly of opinion that the majority of the weavers in my district consider it contradictory to ask for the repeal of one sort of restriction in the corn-laws, and for the adoption of another in the shape of a minimum of wages."<sup>2</sup> Symons himself clearly agrees with this and adds several practical objections to the working of the boards which, he says, taking together with the mistaken principles on which he thought they were based "were enough to show that such a measure would prove detrimental to the interests of the workmen themselves."<sup>3</sup>

We need feel under no obligation to agree with Symons on this point, excellent investigator though he was. Had he been examining those same witnesses four years before he would have found a very different attitude. The weavers had failed

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1. Ibid. p.69.

2. Ibid. p.71.

3. Ibid. p.72.

to get these boards established and they had lost hope and interest in them. But had they succeeded, and had the boards succeeded, they would undoubtedly have been regarded as of the greatest possible value to the trade, and their existence cherished. The restrictive nature of their operations would have been regarded simply in the light, so to speak, of holding the ring for a fair contest between the main combatants. But the weavers had abandoned the project, though failure to secure the boards, in favour of a repeal of the corn-laws. Consequently their attitude to the subject had changed. The weavers' championship of non-intervention here means little more, I feel, than that as it had proved impossible to take any satisfactory measures of intervention, they had fallen back on the belief that any kind of intervention was bound to be unsatisfactory. They were like desperate men <sup>clinging to straws</sup>, Emigration, combination, boards of trade, repeal of the corn-laws, were all at some time their greatest hope. Looking back on it now there seems to have been more hope of success, though only of a very modest kind, in their idea of boards of trade than in any other project. The Committee of 1834 evidently thought so. "Your Committee beg respectfully to declare their opinion, that the distresses of the Petitioners warrant the trial of a measure of this limited nature, and that, if it do not succeed



to the extent of the expectation of the Petitioners, it will at least show that Parliament has sympathised in their distress, and lent a willing ear to their prayers for relief."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the Committee of 1841, reporting on the evidence collected by the Assistant Commissioners in 1838-9, reported very adversely on the usefulness of boards of trade. The commissioners dwelt on the impracticability of such boards. They thought the agreements would be constantly evaded, and this was undoubtedly a possibility in view of the state of the trade, but their main grounds of condemnation were, "the oppression of fixing any general rate of wages, without reference to peculiar and local advantages and disadvantages, and the impossibility of adjusting them by law to those peculiarities."<sup>2</sup> This appears to be rather a criticism of the Fielden plan, than of boards of trade. It seems a pity that the Glasgow plan evidently received so little attention. On its more modest and flexible lines something might have been done. Wage boards could not have raised wages, or even maintained them in face of a really persistent downward trend, except at the cost of increased unemployment of weavers. But they could have performed a function similar to the wage boards of later days; that of preventing the kind of reduc-

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1. Rep.1835. p.1.

2. Rep.1841. p.49.

tions in wages which were the product of ignorance and weak bargaining power.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

It will probably be pointed out that the successful application of any partial remedy, such for instance as was proposed in the boards of trade, would simply have prolonged the distresses of the weavers by halting temporarily the decline of the trade. But as it was all too clear that these men were in the trade, in great numbers and in great distress, and as they could not readily extricate themselves without assistance, the attitude that matters were best left as they were seems altogether objectionable.

In trying to sum up contemporary opinion it is always difficult to distinguish between intentions and results, between what was desired and what was done. In the case of the handloom weavers nothing was done. But it would not be true to say that nothing was desired. Nor would it be true to regard the case of the handloom weavers either as evidence of the disinterest of responsible bodies, or as an instance of a general aversion to extending the sphere of government action. It seems much more likely that it was a practical problem, that the difficulties attendant on any form of government intervention were felt to be insuperable. In



other fields the intervention of the state was advancing, and new powers and new responsibilities were being pressed on to the governments of an expanding industrial society, but like industrialisation itself, it was an uneven business, extending far in one direction and not at all in another. Thus at the same time that the state was beginning to make itself responsible for restriction and regulation of one aspect of the textile trade, - the labour employed in factories, - another aspect of the same trade was left totally unregulated, and the whole problem of the handloom weaving industry, involving the lives of about 800,000 persons,<sup>1</sup> was shelved indefinitely.

It was a tremendous problem. There were so many in the trade, who were there from no particular desire to be weavers but simply because it was a trade which was easy to enter and hard to leave. If they had not been there, they would have been somewhere else. This point was very clearly recognised at the time.<sup>2</sup> The whole problem of the expansion of the population (and not least of the Irish population) had been superimposed upon the structural problem, - that from the late twenties onwards, handloom weaving was a trade in process of being replaced by new methods of manufacture. This

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1. The Committee of 1835 estimated the number of handloom weavers in the United Kingdom and their dependants at 840,000. Rep.1835 p. XI. See also Rep.1841 p.119.

2. See Reports 1835 and 1841

specific question of the handloom being gradually replaced by the powerloom was only a part of the problem, and did not at the time seem as intractable a part, as the tremendous overstocking of the trade with all sorts and conditions of labour for which it had become the repository, - the fact that it had become "the common sewer of unemployed labour."<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand there was the nature of the trade, inexpensive and easy to enter, and simple to learn; on the other was the expanding population and the Irish immigration. At the same time because, due to the uneven progress of the industrial revolution, a corresponding over-all demand for labour had not yet been felt, the rest of the skilled trades were in close combination. A trade like handloom weaving inevitably became the focus of all sorts of problems not specifically its own.

Furthermore it seemed possible that in this trade in which so many had congregated there existed a type of competition which was really excessive. There were a tremendous number of small manufacturers in the trade, especially, it appears, in Scotland. It is possible that less intense competition would not have driven prices so low, and that this might have permitted the paying of higher wages without a

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1. J.C. Symons. Arts and Artizans at Home and Abroad, p.154.

marked reduction in employment. As things stood there was a total lack of any form of organisation in the trade, not even such as was provided in other trades by the workmen's combinations. There does seem to have been a place for intervention here, in the provision of a legal framework for the setting up of wage-boards. But opinion was evidently divided on the question. The Committee of 1835 was in favour of the experiment; the Commissioners of 1841 were against it. It has already been suggested that the proposals for boards of trade, differently framed, might have met with better success, but this is only conjecture. It must be concluded that an opportunity of intervening on behalf of the weavers and the trade generally, strongly urged on the government by the Committee of 1835,<sup>1</sup> was missed, and the opportunity passed. No other opportunity of direct assistance to the trade, with the exception of the two early emigration schemes, presented itself. The establishment of the Poor Law in Scotland in 1845, and the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, can be assumed to have benefited the weavers, but the assistance

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1. "To the sentiment that Parliament cannot and ought not to interfere in cases of this nature, Your Committee is decidedly opposed. On the contrary, where the comfort and happiness of any considerable number of British subjects is at stake, Your Committee conceive that Parliament ought not to delay a moment to enquire, and, if possible, to institute redress". Rep.1835. p. XV.



was very indirect. No direct step to remedy the situation in the trade was taken.

Were the same situation to arise to-day there is no doubt that measures of some kind would be taken. On the one hand there are devices which could be employed such as the wage-board, to regulate wages in trades in which the workers' bargaining power is low due to poor organisation. On the other hand there would probably be some attempt to secure an orderly contraction of the industry, possibly by restriction of entry of new firms, and by measures designed to assist the transfer of labour to other occupations.<sup>1</sup> These, and other remedies like them, are the product of experience and practice in similar situations over a long period. It would be meaningless to make a judgment on what was done in 1835 or 1845 in the light of what might be done in 1955. The only judgment which may be made must be on the basis of what contemporary opinion itself thought about it, and in general, with the exception of the difference of opinion on boards of trade, there seems to have been complete agreement that there was nothing that could be done specifically to amend the

state of the trade. The weavers' hopes could only lie in the

1. It might be added that there are also political forces which increasingly in this century have brought pressure to bear on the government to take action when any considerable industry employing large numbers is in difficulties. But it must be admitted that the same political forces have frequently precluded the application of the measures that the situation really demanded.

bettering of the condition of the labouring classes as a whole, and in an increased demand for labour. Symons sums it up. "Unfortunately the case of the handloom weavers is susceptible of no remedy specifically applied to their case."<sup>1</sup>.. He adds that their best hope lay in the repeal of the corn laws, which, <sup>would</sup> "by increasing the demand for labour, and opening trades which the insufficiency of demand alone keeps combined, ~~to~~ enable deserving men to quit the lower branches of handloom weaving, which would either be annihilated by the powerloom, or left to those who do not desire or deserve to rise. The skilled departments of handloom weaving to which power cannot be applied, would participate in the benefit of increased trade, and would become either the only branch remaining, or the only one respectably handed".<sup>2</sup>

The general feeling at the time of the Enquiries was that the weavers should get out of the trade at once. The words of one manufacturer expresses clearly the general view. "I think the best friends to the weaver are those who would deal with them faithfully, and encourage them to disperse and get other employment as quick as they can".<sup>3</sup> But it was not equally clear that the weavers could follow this advice.

The same manufacturer, when asked what he would suggest the

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1. Symons op.cit. p.154.

2. Symons op.cit. 154-156.

3. Rep.1835. M.E. Q.2241. See also Baines op.cit. p.239.

weavers should do, replied, "I have stated before that there is not a great deal of employment for men that have been brought up to handloom weaving, and perhaps got to the age of 40, 50, or 60 years; a man of that age has his habits fixed, and he is fit for nothing but what he is brought up to, and therefore, no doubt, there would be great difficulty in getting other employment. I stated already, several of our own weavers got other employment in a new machine establishment, one as a porter, another to go for errands, and another, I think, to superintend a little department; a man that could read or write could do that. It is impossible for me to point out how they could get individual employment".<sup>1</sup>

A reluctance to go into the factories is frequently ascribed to the handloom weavers. Chapman for instance suggests that they were slow to take advantage of their opportunities. "The typical handloom weaver with his cottage and loom, who dreaded the thought of factory-life and remained rooted like a tree in his parish, represented a social order that was already obsolete".<sup>2</sup> And again, "Most handloom weavers competed with the factory, instead of entering it and attempting to secure for themselves as large a share as possible of the gain resulting from new economies in production".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Rep. 1835. M.E. q. 2333.

2. op.cit. p. 47.

3. Ibid. p. 46.



But it is not at all clear that the weavers were able to enter the factories when they wished. They themselves said that even if they wanted to, they could not, because of the combinations. There is a great deal of evidence on this point,<sup>1</sup> some of which has been quoted earlier,<sup>2</sup> but one quotation may serve to indicate the position, as stated by the weavers. "How many of the handloom weavers gone into factories?" "No, the whole of the trades have combined and it is impossible for a weaver to break in upon them; but their children, especially young girls, are taken in to work in the power looms".<sup>3</sup> The custom of employing women and girls on the steam looms may well have been partly the result of the early reluctance of the men to go into factories. But the time when the weaver could make a better wage at home than in the factories had passed, and by 1840 there must have been many who would have entered the factories if they could. Symons' writing in 1839, said, "I am confident that the great body of the Scottish weavers long to leave the loom, and would willingly sacrifice all the boasted freedom of the craft for a few of the more substantial comforts of life incidental to any other avocation for which they were competent."<sup>4</sup>

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1. See in particular Report on Combinations of Workmen 1838.

2. See above Ch. VI, p. 187. also Ch. I. p. 35-37.

3. Rep. C.M.S. 1833. M.E. q.11716.

4. Rep. 1839, p.55.

Chapman makes a further point on what he takes to be the lack of spirit shown by the weavers. He criticises the cotton weavers in Scotland for not getting out of their own branch into the more profitable linen or woollen branches, with which the power loom, before 1839, had not come into competition. "Yet the cotton weavers in Scotland, and perhaps those in England, did not attempt to transfer their labour to the woollen industry, partly for lack of enterprise; partly because they could not give the few days requisite for bearing the new work, or afford to remount their looms even at the trifling cost of 20s".<sup>1</sup> This is clearly a misunderstanding of the position in Scotland. The woollen and the linen branches, in their well-paid sections at least, were factory trades. And in these branches it was not the competition of the power-loom that was so much feared by the weavers as the influx of new hands to overwhelm the trade with numbers, as the cotton weavers had been overwhelmed. The weavers in these branches therefore, were in close combination and it required great influence to break in on them.<sup>2</sup> The whole question is one of uncertainty but it seems probable that the weavers could not immediately solve their problems by going either into the hand loom or the power loom factories, or certainly, despite

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1. Chapman op.cit. p.48.

2. See Symons' story of the Galashiels hand loom factory *Rep. 1839*. pp.55 and 56.

their admitted dislike of factory work, many more would have done so.

The question finally arises therefore of what became of the handloom weavers. After the publication of the last Report in 1841 we have no further exact and detailed evidence, but it seems a reasonable surmise to make that for perhaps ten years after the publication of this Report not much change took place in the state of the trade. Generally speaking the weavers were not fit for heavy labour, such as navvying on the railways, and unless they could get into semi-skilled work, or the factories, or work of that kind, they were obliged to wait until the expanding industry and trade of the third quarter of the century enabled many of them, or of their children, to get out of the trade.

In some branches the hand trade persisted for a long time. In the weaving of light linens round Forfar, for instance, the introduction of the power loom was remarkably late. "At present (1864) there are about 4,500 handlooms in and around Forfar. In the course of a few more years, this branch will probably become a thing of the past, as the fabrics manufactured are admirably adapted for power looms, and steam seems destined to supplant manual labour in the weaving of Linen".<sup>1</sup> But at the same time there were even in the plain

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1. Warden. op.cit. p.560.



cotton trade, where the power loom had long since taken over, men struggling to make a living by the handloom.<sup>1</sup> These were probably older men, too set in their ways or too poor in health to try to change their trade. After a life-time of weaving it would be difficult for an older man to get taken on elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> It may fairly be supposed that those who got out of the trade would be generally the young and strong men, not necessarily the skilled. And it may also be supposed that many lingered in the trade long after it had ceased to afford them any sort of living. This state of affairs had in fact been reached by 1841, and the publication of the Report of that year, which could recommend no measures of assistance, may be regarded as marking the end of handloom weaving as a trade in which a man could expect to obtain a reasonable return for the hours of his labour and the skill which he expended.

The decline of a trade in such painful circumstances would be an embittering experience for any body of men, but the remarkable character of the weavers as a group, foremost in intelligence and understanding among the artisans of the

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1. As late as 1864 Henry Carrigan of Bridgeton gave evidence to the Children's Employment Commission as Secretary of a Handloom Weavers' Association, "If only to affirm the destitution of his fellows".
  2. Long before this it had been an accepted fact that "being once in the trade they contract sedentary habits, and are of no use at agriculture, nobody would take them at half the wages". Rep. on Petition of Journeyman Weavers 1811. p. 6.

country, makes these sufferings appear all the greater. They had been held in universal regard, and not without reason.

"Weavers then formed, as a whole, a remarkable class of men - intelligent, and observant of the progress of events at home and abroad; devoted to politics, strongly or wildly radical, if not tainted with revolutionary sentiments, after the intoxication of the first French Revolution; great talkers when they gathered together in the street or public-house, during the intervals of work; intensely theological, often religious, well versed in all the intricacies of Calvinism, severest critics of the minister's discourses, and keenest of heresy-hunters, scenting it from afar, in phrase or simile, herein only being strong conservatives - in a word, general guardians of the Church, reformers of the state, and proud patrons of learning and the schoolmaster; but, withal, good fathers, good churchmen, good citizens, and not seldom good men".<sup>1</sup> Twenty years after the time to which this refers

Symons was writing, "when a man's whole facilities are strained to the utmost from sunrise to sunset to procure a miserable subsistence, he has neither leisure, aptitude, nor desire for information...The degenerating influence of poverty and excessive toil was never more strongly exemplified than in

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1. William Jolly. John Duncan Weaver and Botanist. p. 21.

the case of the handloom weavers of Scotland".<sup>1</sup>

It was a most saddening experience, which one would never wish to see repeated, of a body of men who in such numbers became the victims of circumstances over which neither they nor anyone else had any control.. "The great grievance of the condition of the weavers consists, not in the lowness of wages - for there must always be some trade where the wages are lower than in others, - but in the fact that men of merit<sup>and</sup> of talent, who have experienced and deserve better fortunes, should by a combination of circumstances, have become enchained to a trade, which is daily sinking them lower in the depths of destitution, and from which they have not the power of escape".<sup>2</sup>

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1. Symons. op.cit. pp.147-148.

2. Ibid. p.156.



## APPENDIX

TABLE 1

Table showing weekly wages of weaver employed on 54 inch wide pullicate, from 1806-1838 inclusive. <sup>1</sup>

Year.	Wage. s..d.	Year.	Wage. s..d.
1806	32/6	1823	12/3
1807	25/9	1824	12/3
1808	23/-	1825	10/-
1810	21/3	1826	8/3
1811	26/9	1827	10/-
1812	18/-	1828	6/7
1813	25/9	1829	6/-
1814	24/9	1830	5/6
1815	26/9	1831	5/6
1816	25/9	1832	5/6
1817	12/3	1833	5/6
1818	15/9	1834	6/7
1819	16/9	1835	6/7
1820	10/-	1836	7/5
1821	12/3	1837	6/3
1822	12/3	1838	6/7

1. Rep.1839 p.14. This table, which comprises the figures of only one manufacturer, is given simply as an illustration of the trend of weaving prices in this branch.

TABLE 2

Table showing Rates of Wages in Other Trades. <sup>1</sup>

Trades	1810 1820 1825 1830 to to to to					
	1810	1820	1825	1830	1835	1838
Bricklayers	17/-	16/-				
Bootmakers	20/-	18/-	15/-	15/-	16/-	16/-
Brassfounders			18/5	18/5	19/-	20/-
Breakers of Metal						9/- & 10/-
Cotton Spinners				20/2	26/1	28/10
Carding Masters				17/9	16/10	17/6
Cabinetmakers	19/-	18/-	18/-	16/-	18/-	18/- & 20/-
Calenderers	15/-	15/-	15/-	15/-	15/-	15/-
Calico-printers	18/-	18/-	18/-	18/-	18/-	18/-
Factory Dressers						18/10
" Twisters						8/4
" Warpers						9/6
Masons	17/-				18/-	19/-
Plumbers	22/6		25/-	25/-	25/-	25/-
Painters	17/-	17/-				16/6
Plasterers	21/-	21/-			20/-	20/-
Patternmakers					21/6	21/6
Slaters	16/6	20/-	20/-	20/-	20/-	20/-
Sawyers	24/-	24/-	24/-	24/-	24/-	24/-
Toppers in Spinning Factory					14/-	14/-

<sup>1</sup>, Taken from a table given by Symons. Rep. 1839. p.15.



TABLE 3

Table showing the number of Persons supplied with work by the Glasgow Relief Committee in 1837. <sup>1</sup>

Applicants	Scotch		Irish English Foreigners Total				
	Glasgow Other Parts Total						
Weavers	1151	588	1739	1103	32	10	2884
Other Trades	102	79	181	--	7	--	188
Total	1253	667	1920	1103	39	10	3072
Ages of Applicants:							
Below 30	607	227	834	304	17	3	1158
Above 30	497	265	762	532	15	6	1315
Above 50	149	175	324	267	7	1	599
Total	1253	667	1920	1103	39	10	3072
Unionists, & their ages:							
Below 30	259	123	382	176	8		566
30-50	284	149	433	302	10	1	746
Above 50	70	53	123	117	1		241
Total	613	325	938	595	19	1	1553

<sup>1</sup> Report on Poor Laws (Scotland) 1844. Appendix Part I. A 7001.

TABLE 4

Table showing number of Persons supplied with food at  
the Soup-Kitchens. <sup>1</sup>

	Males	Females	Total	Ages of Applicants		Total
Weavers	247	45	392	Under 30 <sup>2</sup>	175	
Other trades	81	627	708	30-50	499	
	328	672	1000	Above 50	326	1000

1. Made up from List supplied by Baird. *Ibid.* Q 7001.

2. The number of children supplied is given separately  
as 2188.

TABLE 5

Weavers Working to the Paisley and Renfrewshire Relief Association  
since November 25, 1841.

Weavers working for week ending -		Weavers working for week ending -	
December 4, 1841	....260	May 7, 1842	....518
11, "	....400	14, "	....504
18, "	....550	21, "	....421
25, "	....700	30, "	....367
January 1, 1842	....734	June 6, 1842	....340
8, "	....830	13, "	....323
15, "	....912	20, "	....306
22, "	....890	27, "	....315
29, "	....880		
February 5, 1842	....870	July 4, 1842	....334
12, "	....850	11, "	....361
19, "	....	18, "	....356
26, "	....785	25, "	....355
		28, "	....310
March 5, 1842	....743	August 1, 1842	....285
12, "	....693	8, "	....203
19, "	....657	15, "	....158
26, "	....503	22, "	....107
		29, "	....71
April 2, 1842	....562	September 5, 1842	....30
9, "	....480		
16, "	....490		
23, "	....490		
30, "	....517		



TABLE 6

Emigration Societies in the County of Renfrew in  
January 1827. 1

Name of Society	Adults	Children	Total
Paisley Friendly Emigration Society No. 1.	196	410	606
Paisley Caledonian	107	201	308
Paisley & Suburbs	112	183	295
Paisley Canadian	217	459	676
Paisley Caledonian St.	53	100	153
The Irish Friendly	200	376	576
Elderslie Emigration	100	211	311
Barrhead & Nielston	86	156	242
Broomland	130	244	374
Hibernian Protestant	119	211	330
Govan Emigration	98	175	273
Paisley Friendly No. 2	120	266	386
Johnston Emigration	30	93	123
Total.....	1768	3085	4653

1. Taken from "Abstract of the Number of Persons composing the following Societies in the County of Renfrew, who have petitioned for aid to enable them to emigrate to the British Possessions in North America, made up by the direction of the Lord Lieutenant of Renfrewshire, January, 1827. *Report of the Select Committee on Emigration 1827. H.E. & 175.*

TABLE 7

Depositors in the Savings Bank at Paisley, showing the amount invested per head by the following classes in the years 1840-1842. 1

Class	At 20 Nov. 1840 <sup>2</sup>			At 20 Nov. 1841			At 20 Nov. 1842		
	No.	Amt. per head	£s	No.	Amt. per head	£s	No.	Amt. per head	£s
Domestic Servants	196	11		207	13		178	15	
Weavers	149	8		120	10		116	9	
Pattern-drawers, ) Flower-lashers, ) Warpers & Dyers )	74	12		62	10		39	13	
Factory Workers	45	7		50	8		56	4	
Mechanics & ) Artificers )	169	13		139	13		104	13	
Labourers, Gardners ) & Porters )	154	10		107	12		68	14	

1. Abstract made up from table given in Rep. of S.C. on Poor Law 1843, App. I p.589.  
2. To the nearest £.

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